வாழிய செந்தமிழ் வாழ்க நற்றமிழர்
டெல்லித் தமிழ்ச் சங்கம்
வாழிய பாரத மணித் திருநாடு.

பிறநாட்டு நல்லறிஞர் சாத்திரங்கள்
தமிழ் மொழியிற் பெயர்த்தல் வேண்டும்;

இறவாத புகழுடைய புதுநூல்கள்
தமிழ் மொழியில் இயற்றல் வேண்டும்;

மறைவாக நமக்குள்ளே பழங்கதைகள்
சொல்வதிலோர் மகிமையில்லை;

திறமான புலமையெனில் வெளிநாட்டோர்
அதை வணக்கஞ் செய்தல் வேண்டும்.

—பாரதியார்

KAMBA RAMAYANAM—A STUDY

By V. V. S. Aiyar

Other Works

ENGLISH

THE TIRUKKURAL—*Complete Translation*
(Out of print)

A HISTORY OF INDIA
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TAMIL

MANGAYARKARASIYIN KATHAL—*Short Stories*

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NAPOLEON
(A book on Military Strategy—Confiscated by the late British Government in India)

THAN-NAMBIKKAI
Translation of Ralph Waldo Emerson's SELF-RELIANCE.
2nd Edition by Sarvodaya Pirasuralayam, Virapandi, Tiruppur (1950).

GURU GOVIND SINGH—*A Biographical sketch.*
2nd Edition (1950) *by Navayuga Pirasuralayam, Karaikudi.*

KURUNTOGAI
Translation in English verse of the ancient Tamil Classic.
(Unpublished Manuscript lost in 1942 disturbances.)

JUL 1971

KAMBA RAMAYANAM — A STUDY

WITH TRANSLATIONS IN VERSE

OR POETIC PROSE

OF

OVER FOUR THOUSAND OF THE ORIGINAL POEMS

By

V. V. S. AIYAR

WITH A FOREWORD

BY

HON'BLE SRI K. SANTANAM,

MINISTER OF STATE, TRANSPORT & RAILWAYS, INDIA

A DELHI TAMIL SANGAM PUBLICATION

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

There is a Tamil proverb in which one mendicant asks another, "Say brother, are you a mendicant by ancestry or are you a mendicant by famine ?" We are publishing this book due to a famine of publishers of whom there are too many more worthy than us to publish it. If the gods had been kind, this work would probably have been published a quarter of a century ago by reputed English publishers under the sponsorship of the great Irish poet, George Russell, more widely known as 'A.E.'

We had intended to tell in this note the story of how we came to do this work, and of the many difficulties and obstacles we had to surmount, chief among which is our colossal ignorance of the job and of everything else besides. But we are now so nearly bursting with pride in the successful achievement of our labours that, if we let ourselves go, the four-hundred odd pages of this book will not be sufficient for the epic of our travails.

So we content ourselves with expressing our deep sense of gratitude to all those who have helped us spontaneously and ungrudgingly in publishing this book. They are so many, and however small or big their help has been, the love behind the aid of each of them yields place to none else. We mention by name only a few.

To Aiyar's son, Dr. V. V. S. Krishnamurthy who honoured us with his faith and entrusted the manuscripts to us and stood by us with every possible help, we cannot find adequate words to express our gratitude.

We are indebted to the Editors of the *Dinamani*, the *Dinamani Kadir*, the *Hindu*, the *Indian Express*, the *Hindustan Times*, the *Atma Jyoti* of Ceylon and other publications for the publicity they so generously gave to our projected publication. We thank them most sincerely for this invaluable help. We owe the success of our effort to the tireless band of friends and associations in Delhi and

other places who took upon themselves the onerous task of canvassing subscribers. We can never cease to be grateful to them. We should next thank all our subscribers who so trustingly paid the price several months in advance and made it possible to publish this book. We thank them for their faith in us.

We take great pleasure in being able to print a Foreword from Hon'ble Sri K. Santanam, Minister of State. Transport and Railways, India. He is a close friend of Aiyar and his family and he has followed with keen interest the progress of the publication of this book. We sincerely thank him for taking the trouble to write this Foreword in the midst of his pressing duties.

We are indebted to the Director of the HIND, an excellent quarterly published in France and devoted purely to the culture and literature of Bharata Kanda, for permission to quote certain extracts from an article by Monsieur S. KICHENASSAMY (*Sakti sei*) *on Le Ramayana de Kamban,* in the second issue of the first volume (1949). The HIND is published from 41, *Rue de la Bienfaisance,* Paris 8e, price 1,000 francs a year—250 francs per issue. We take this occasion to tender our thanks also to the few authors and publishers from whose works we have taken small extracts to adorn our foot-notes. Being very brief extracts we have not sought specific permission, which omission, we sincerely hope, these large-hearted friends will overlook in the cause of knowledge. Suitable acknowledgements have been made at the proper places.

We have, throughout the book, linked the translations in English verse with the original poems and have given references to Book, Canto, and stanza. These references follow the edition of the *Kamba Ramayanam* in Tamil (with elaborate commentaries) in seven volumes by Sri V. M. Gopalakrishnamachariar of 17, T.P. Koil Street, Triplicane, Madras. The Roman figures refer to the *Kandams* or Books, the small Roman figures to the *Padalams* or Cantos, and the Arabic numbers to the stanzas.

Quotations by Aiyar from the *Valmiki Ramayana* have been printed in italics. Except in one or two places, Aiyar has taken these quotations from Griffith.

The foot-notes, except in the case of reference numbers to the original poems in *Kamba Ramayanam* are by the author in nearly all cases. We have, however, felt called upon to add a few. As these are, in intention and form, completely in accord with Aiyar's plan, who, if he had lived to publish this work, would have added these notes, we have not distinguished them by any special sign. There are none by us, we hasten to assure the readers, which expresses any opinion or criticism. Ours are innocuous ones like meaning of a phrase or word, chiefly for the benefit of the foreign reader. In a few cases, however, where the notes should be so marked on account of their import, we have shown the letter 'P' within brackets.

Aiyar had intended to crown his work with the character-study of Sita and had fittingly reserved it to the last. Cruel fate, however, stretched its talons and tragically snatched him away from this world before he could sing Sita's virtues. Though very reluctant to make any additions to Aiyar's work, we felt a certain infelicity in letting the work appear without Sita and hence a character-sketch has been added to this book. It is written by a member of the Delhi Tamil Sangam.

Prof. A. Srinivasa Raghavan who had very kindly agreed to write this chapter, and, in fact, to edit the rest of the book as well, has been prevented from doing so by pressure of work, want of leisure and ill health. We know how much our subscribers will be disappointed. We tender our sincere regrets to them.

It has been our endeavour—we had almost said, an obsession with us—to make this work free of that common eye-sore of publications in this country—the list of Errata. Still, some errors have escaped our vigilant eyes ; we offer no excuses but beg to be forgiven. We absolve our printers from all responsibility for any of these.

Though the book itself is a testimony to the excellent work of our printers, The Jupiter Press Ltd., of Madras, it cannot speak of two of their outstanding claims on our gratitude. Their prompt execution of the work at every stage and their close co-operation only has made it possible to bring out this book so quickly. As whatever we may say will appear a hyperbole—we feel so enthusiastic about this trait of our printers—we pass on to their next virtue—the almost unique excellence of their proofs, first or second. Sometimes, we had uncharitably wished that they were not so perfect, as such perfection made our guilt in making later corrections stand forth very glaringly.

We acknowledge with pleasure and gratitude the invaluable help of the small band of friends who typed the manuscripts, sometimes again and again, ungrudgingly, and of those who checked them and the press proofs so carefully. Any excellence in the get-up of this work is due to their tireless help.

The cover design is by Sri R. Mahadevan who has adopted the Sangam as the special beneficiary of his selfless service.

We cannot refrain from mentioning with gratitude Mr. S. Ramaswamy who has looked after our work at Madras. Without him, we do not know into what snares and pitfalls we would have fallen.

Our acknowledgements to those to whom we are indebted in the Introductory Essay on Tamil and the chapter on Sita are made in the respective chapters.

We thank God who has deigned to use us as His instrument for this service to Kamban and Tamil, and we tender this work with humility at His lotus feet as our humble offering.

30*th June*, 1950. THE DELHI TAMIL SANGAM.

CONTENTS

		Page
KAPPU	.. ..	xiv
Foreword by Hon'ble Sri K. SANTANAM	..	xv
Tamil—The Language and Its Literature (*A Brief Survey*)	..	xvii
Kamban—*A Short Note*	.. .. ..	lxv
V. V. S. Aiyar—A Biographical Sketch	..	lxvi
Gandhiji on Aiyar	.. ..	lxxii
Kamba Ramayanam—A Study—		
Chapter		
I	Introductory Remarks	1
II	The Story of the Ramayana ..	5
III	In Medias Res	26
IV	The Architectonics of the Ramayana	34
V	The Supernatural Element in the Ramayana	40
VI	Rama	46
VII	Lakshmana	71
VIII	Indrajit—His Exploits and Death ..	101
IX	Vibhishana and Kumbhakarna ..	125
X	The Episode of Hiranyakashipu ..	152
XI	Vali and Sugriva	169
XII	Hanuman	195
XIII	Ravana	231
XIV	Bharata	279
	Sita (*Contributed by a member of the Delhi Tamil Sangam*)	311

	Page
Appendices	
I Garuda's Flight	345
II Valmiki's Vali	347
Index	375
Index to Sita	379
Errata	380

Plates :

V. V. S. Aiyar	*facing page* lxvi
Fac-simile of a page from Aiyar's Manuscripts	,, ,, lxxi

THE DELHI TAMIL SANGAM

(FOUNDED—*January 1946*)

FOUNDER–PRESIDENT
Sri S. Subramanyam.

FOUNDER–SECRETARY
Sri A. V. Kuppuswamy.

The Sangam was begun in a small room in a local boarding house in January 1946 with less than a dozen members.

It was fostered with great care by the selfless work of the Founder-President and the first Secretary of the Sangam and it was chiefly due to them that the Sangam occupies its present position of the cultural centre of the Tamilar in Delhi.

The Sangam is housed in a building kindly provided by the Chief Commissioner of Delhi to whom the Sangam is ever grateful.

The objects of the Sangam are :

To provide a venue for the Tamilar to enjoy the cultural benefits of the Tamil Literature in its three fields—Poetry and Prose, Music, and Drama, and to enable them to establish cultural contacts with the people of the local province.

The Sangam fosters the following activities in furtherance of its objects :—

(*a*) Conducting of Study Classes in Tamil literature.

(*b*) Arranging lectures by eminent scholars on Tamil and cognate subjects.

(*c*) Weekly Summer talks by members of the Sangam.

(*d*) Celebration of the two important Tamil festivals—The *Pongal* and the Tamil New Year—and of Days of the Great Savants of Tamil.

(*e*) The publication of a manuscript Tamil Magazine for the self-expression of the members.

(*f*) Maintaining an excellent library of Tamil literature.

(*g*) Conducting a class in Hindi for the members.

(*h*) Maintaining a Free Reading Room (in memory of the orator and patriot S. Satyamurthi) for the Public of Delhi and providing same with English, Hindi and Tamil Newspapers and Periodicals.

காப்பு

செவ்வரிநற் கருநெடுங்கண் சீதைக்காகிச்
சினவிடையோன் சிலையிறுத்து மழுவாளேந்தி,
வெவ்வரிநற் சிலைவாங்கி வென்றிகொண்டு
வேல்வேந்தர் படைதடிந்த வீரன்றன்னை,
தெவ்வரஞ்ச நெடும்புரிசை யுயர்ந்த பாங்கர்த்
தில்லைநகர்த் திருச்சித்ர கூடந்தன்னுள்,
எவ்வரிவஞ்சிலைத் தடக்கையிராமன் றன்னை
யிறைஞ்சுவாரிணையடியே யிறைஞ்சினேனே.

—பெருமாள் திருமொழி 10–3.

FOREWORD

This profound study of *Kamba Ramayanam* seeks to present to the world the greatness of the immortal epic of Hindu Culture as portrayed by the greatest of Tamil poets. It is no exaggeration to say that Valmiki's *Ramayana* almost superseded the Vedas and the Smritis as the fountain source of Hindu religion and morals. It was inevitable that it should become the ambition of the poetic geniuses who arose from time to time in the various parts of India to seek to render the Ramayana into their own languages. Of these attempts, the Ramayana of Kamban in Tamil and that of Tulsidas in Hindi (*Brij Bhasha*) stand foremost. They are often considered superior to the original by their enthusiastic admirers. I do not subscribe to this view. Taken as a whole, I think Valmiki's Ramayana is incomparable in its simplicity, dignity and power to move the mind. It is nevertheless true that for sheer beauty of language and delicate portrayal of character and emotion, Kamban ordinarily equals and often excels Valmiki. The author, V. V. S. Aiyar, who undertook this difficult task of presenting the study in English of Kamba Ramayanam was a remarkable personality. Perhaps, the simplest way to assess him is to say that he stood in the field of politics and erudition in the same relation to Lokamanya Tilak as Subramanya Bharati stood to Rabindranath Tagore in the field of poetry. With the dawn of the Gandhian era, V. V. S. Aiyar had changed over from his older ideas of violent revolution to those of non-violent satyagraha. Unfortunately he died before he could play an effective part in the new struggle for national liberation.

Aiyar's love of the Tamil language and his eagerness to enrich it and interpret it to the non-Tamil world were

second only to his passion for Indian independence. He died before his fame could be securely established. The Delhi Tamil Sangam has done a great service to all lovers of literature by undertaking the publication of this study. It is to be hoped that their attempt will be crowned with success and the volume will have the popularity it deserves.

NEW DELHI,
16*th June,* 1950.

K. SANTANAM.

TAMIL

A Brief Survey of the Language and its Literature.

(Compiled by a Member of the Delhi Tamil Sangam.)

Introductory.

This book, KAMBA RAMAYANAM—A STUDY, was written by V. V. S. Aiyar with the avowed object of introducing this great literary treasure—the Epic of the *Ramayana* by Kamban—to those who do not know the Tamil language. This fruit of Tamil Poesy is only one among the varied fruits and flowers in the Garden of Tamil. We feel, therefore, that we should take the reader with us into this ancient and flourishing garden for a stroll—however brief it may be—so that he may have an idea of the realm from which this particular fruit came.

It is impossible to do any reasonable measure of justice to this vast subject of Tamil and its Literature in this short essay. We can but make brief mention of many important matters which would leave an impression of dogmatic assertions in the absence of the volume of evidence behind them. This essay would, however, have served our purpose if it did but give the readers a glimpse of the antiquity and greatness of the Tamilar, their language and its literature, and their place in the culture of this Bharata Khanda—called India, and the world. For a detailed study, we would refer the readers to the various books on the subject some of which have been mentioned in the Bibliography at the end of this survey.

ii. The Tamilar—Their Origin.

A language is but the medium of expression of a people. It is the people who shape the language and give it the impress of their own character and life. Who are the Tamilar? Or, broadly speaking, who are the Dravidians—by which name the various peoples in the south are designated?

The origin of the Dravidians cannot be studied or settled without the help of geological, anthropological, ethnological and philological evidences.

Pre-historic Land of the Tamilar.

On the evidence of very close affinities between the plants and animals in Africa and India at a very remote period, Mr. R. D. Oldhame concludes [1] that there was once a continuous stretch of dry land

[1] *Manual of the Geology of India.*

connecting South Africa and India. This large continent of former times which extended from the Sunda Islands along the southern coast of Asia to the east coast of Africa, Selata has called Lemuria. "Peninsular India or Deccan", says Sir T. W. Holderness,[1] "is geologically distinct from the Indo-Gangetic plain of the Himalayas. It is the remains of a former continent which stretched continuously to Africa in the space now occupied by the Indian Ocean. In the Deccan, we are in the first days of the world. We see land substantially as it existed before the beginnings of life. When the world was still in the making and before the elevation of the Himalayas, the space now occupied by the plain was a sea."

Without going to the extent, as some savants of research do, of claiming Lemuria or Deccan, its remnant, to be the probable cradle of the human race, we may assume that it was the cradle of the Dravidians. It was however the cradle only, not the birthplace.

Acute difference of opinion, however, exists among scholars in regard to the early origin and history of the Dravidians. Some very learned men are of opinion that the Dravidians were invaders and that they came through the north-western route leading to the plains of Hindustan, and later migrated to the south. In proof of this theory, they point to the existence of a Dravidian tribe in Baluchistan speaking the Brahui language which is closely allied to Tamil. On the other hand, equally learned scholars maintain that the Brahuis were the remnants of an overflow of Dravidians from India to Baluchistan[2]. Although the invasion through the historic period have been *into* India, yet the fact remains that India was not connected with the mainland of Asia during the pre-historic times and that the Peninsular India during even remoter periods was connected with Africa on the west and the Malayan Archipelago on the east.

Original Home of the Tamilar.

Ethnological evidences seem to point to the Iberian or Mediterranean Race as the ancestors of the Dravidians, who, it is suggested, migrated along the sea-coast and across the sea to the

1 *Peoples and Problems of India.*

2 In a small work of this kind, it will be misleading to make any reference to the recent excavations in Mohenjadaro by Dr. Wheeler, and the train of hypotheses and counter-hypotheses which the finds have set in motion. The ultimate conclusions will throw valuable light on the civilization of the Tamilar. The excavations are not yet completed and await to be started again.

Southern Peninsula. Readers are referred to the excellent treatise by A. C. Hodden on *The Races of Men and their Distribution* for the reasons underlying this theory.

These are the people whose language in the south was Tamil from which were born later, Telugu, Malayalam, Canarese, Tulu and Oran (Oriya).

iii. The Tamilar—Their Country.

While the extent of the land and its location where these people lived in pre-historic times may be a matter of conjecture, we are on surer ground regarding the boundaries of the abode of Tamilar—*Tamil-akam*—in historic times. "The extent of this *Tamil-akam* was not however always the same. Tolkappiyar, the great Tamil grammarian, probably of the fourth century B.C., Ilango-adigal, the royal ascetic and reputed author of *Silappadikaram,* and Sikandiyar, a pupil of Agastyar and the author of a treatise on music, have made references in their works to the boundaries of the Tamil country, from which we can infer that the *Tamil-akam* extended east and west from sea to sea and north to south from the Tirupati Hills to Cape Comorin, and to have also included the modern States of Travancore and Cochin and the Madras district of Malabar.

Tamil-Nad in Historical Times.

This land was divided into three principal kingdoms. They were the Pandya, Cola, and Cera Kingdoms. Their boundaries varied widely at different times. We deduce their extent from certain poems of Auvvai's time. She is said to have been a contemporary of Kamban.

The Three Kingdoms.

The extent of the Pandya Kingdom is defined thus in a poem ascribed to Auvvai :

> "South of the river Vellar [1], Comorin on the south, the sea sought by the gulf on the east, and open plain [2] on the west comprising fifty-six *Kavathams.*[3]"

The Cola Kingdom, according to Puhalendhi, a later day poet, is described in this wise.

1 "The Vellar passes through (what was) the State of Pudukottah and falls into the sea, south of Point Calemere.

2 "*Peruveli* the open plain or *Peruvali* probably refers to the Achan Koil Ghat leading to Travancore."—M. S. P. Pillai.

3 *Kavatham*—a distance of about ten miles.

"The sea to the east, the overflowing Vellar to the south, Kottaikarai to the west, and Elam to the north covering twenty-four *Kavathams.*"

[Kottaikarai was the boundary of the three kingdoms. The Cola Kings were great warriors and extended their country to Venkata or the hot hill and to the Pennar river.]

It was in extent just a half of the Pandya Kingdom.

The Cera kingdom's boundaries too have been sung by Auvvai who says:

"The northernmost point is Palni, right to the east is Shencottah (*Tenkasi* is another reading), to the west is Calicut, the sea-shore on the south—extending over eighty *Kavathams.*"

[Chencode is taken by some to refer to Tiruchencode in the Salem District.]

In point of extent it was as much as the other two put together.

The emblems on the flags of the Kings of these three Kingdoms[1] were the Fish for the Pandyas, the Tiger for the Colas, and the Bow for the Ceras. All the three were unswerving patrons of Tamil Literature and its poets.

These were the lands and these the Kings whose peoples' ancient heritage is Tamil, a language as ancient as and coeval with, if not older than, any ancient language alive or dead in the world.

iv. The Tamilar—Their Language and Its Origin.

Tamil—Its meaning.

Tamil is the name of the language spoken by the peoples of the lands we have specified above. The word ends with the consonant ழ which is unique to the Tamil language and would therefore denote an indigenous origin to the word. This letter, in its consonant form ழ் has been assigned a pronunciation of *Zh* when transliterated in other languages, and *Zha* when it becomes a vowel-consonant. Much wordy warfare has raged round the question of the origin of the name of the language, whether it is indigenous or one given by foreigners. More phonological pedantry

[1] Their emblems adorn the seal of the Delhi Tamil Sangam, with the Madhurai Temple to signify the headquarters of the ancient Tamil Sangams and the Kutub Minar standing for Delhi where, among many other places, the torch of Tamil is carried on to this day.

has been exercised[1] and much ingenuity has been shown in fixing the meaning of the term.

Most authorities are now agreed that the name 'Tamil' means 'sweetness': only those who have heard the *Tevaram* and *Tiruvaymoli* (The Saiva and Vaishnava devotional hymns) chanted in the traditional manner could alone know how appropriate this meaning is.

Morphological Classification.

"According to M. Hovalacque" writes Mr. M. Srinivasa Aiyangar[2] "Tamil is one of the principal languages spoken on the face of the globe at the present day. Morphologically, the existing languages are divided into four groups, *viz.*, isolating, agglutinative, polysynthetic and inflectional."

"The morphological classification is based entirely on the form or manner in which the roots or the final elements of a language are put together to form words and sentences. In the isolating languages, like Chinese, the roots are used as words, each root preserving its full independence, unrestricted by any idea of person, gender, number, time or mood; and, in fact, languages of this kind do not require any grammar. In the agglutinative languages when two roots join together to form a word one of them loses its independence subjecting itself to phonetic corruption. This is called the terminational stage. When words blend together in a sentence by syncope and ellipsis, it is called polysynthesis. This is a feature peculiar to American languages. Thus . . . . . the Algonquin. . . . . Languages in which relations between words are expressed not only by suffixes and prefixes, but also by a modification of the form of roots, are called inflectional languages. For example . . . Sanskrit. . . . . ."

"The theory that languages must pass through the monosyllabic and the agglutinative phases successively before reaching the inflectional stage—a theory current when Dr. Caldwell wrote his *Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian Languages*—has now been given up. An isolating dialect does not become

1 We feel compelled to quote Mr. Eric Partridge, who offers some sound advice on this matter in his book *English—A Course for Human Beings*. He says: "Personal taste is still potent on the one hand; on the other, phonological pedantry should not be allowed to browbeat good sense. Whenever you encounter that kind of pedantry, that sort of linguistic lunacy, shrug your shoulders; and let good-sense, aided by sane scholarship, guide you . . . . ."

2 *T.S.* p. 147.

Important Note:

The reader is invited to refer to the Bibliography at the end of this essay. Abbreviations used in the footnotes while referring to the books will be found therein. Such references will be found on almost each page and should be taken to mean that the paras on the page are either quotations or are based on the book or books.

agglutinative, or an agglutinative one inflectional. The radical feature of a language explained in this fourfold classification, besides being innate to that tongue, is expressive of the racial character of the people that speak it ; it cannot change from one class to another though it can be modified or altered by external circumstances.

"To the agglutinative group belongs Tamil, while Sanskrit is the most ancient cultivated member of the inflectional family. Morphologically the one has no connection with the other." Limitation of space forbids us from dwelling on any aspect of this essay at any length ; we shall therefore, conclude this portion with a few quotations from the same author and proceed to the Tamil alphabet, and Tamil Literature which latter is the proper subject of our survey.

Relationship between Sanskrit and Tamil.

"The degree of relationship between Tamil and Sanskrit, which are the only two important languages known to the Tamils, has been variously estimated. During the early centuries of the Christian era, the Tamils, who were not much acquainted with Sanskrit, seem to have always held that Tamil was an independent language and that it had nothing to do with Sanskrit. They did not attribute its origin to Siva, Subramanya or Agastya, as the imaginative and sectarian scholars of a later date have done. But when they came under the influence of Sanskrit culture, that is, subsequent to the seventh or eighth century A.D., and when Sanskrit *puranas* and other Sanskrit religious literature were introduced, the views of Tamil scholars began to change. Most of them were acquainted with both Tamil and Sanskrit ; yet they had greater love and reverence for the latter, as their Vedas and *Puranas* and *Agamas* were written in that language ; and this partiality or rather a sentiment verging on *odium theologicum* induced them to trace Tamil from Sanskrit just as the early European divines tried to trace the Western languages from the Hebrew.

"All that we can say at present is that Tamil occupies the same position in the Dravidian family that Sanskrit does in the Aryan—that is, Tamil is the oldest and the most cultivated of the Dravidian or South Indian family of languages." [1]

Mr. T. R. Sesha Iyengar has some interesting observations to make on this question. "Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, and Canarese *i.e.*, the Dravidian languages," he writes, "are all fundamentally

[1] *Tamil Studies* by M. Srinivasa Aiyangar, pp. 151-152 and 167.

different from Sanskrit, the language of the Aryans. These languages, while they have a common origin and a close affinity to each other, are different from Sanskrit and its derivatives.

"No person, who is well-versed in comparative philology and who has compared the primitive and essential words and the grammatical structure of the Dravidian languages with those of Sanskrit, can imagine for a moment that the former have been derived from the latter by any process of development or corruption. Sanskrit may contribute to the polish of the South Indian languages, but is not necessary for their existence. The non-Sanskrit portion of the Dravidian languages exceeds the Sanskrit portion. The base of Tamil, the most highly cultivated as regards its original structure of all the Dravidian languages, has an independent origin. In its more primitive words, such as the names of natural objects, the verbs expressive of physical action or passion, and the numerals, it is unconnected with Sanskrit. The Tamil language retains an alphabet . . . which has several letters of peculiar powers. Tamil is not dependent on Sanskrit for the full expression of thought. The ancient or classical dialect of this language, the *Sen* Tamil, is almost entirely free from Sanskrit words and idioms. The finest works in Tamil, such as the *Kural*, are original in design and execution, and also independent of Sanskrit. According to Dr. Burnell, the science of grammar (*vyakarna*) was cultivated in the south from a very early period, not as derived from Sanskrit, but as communicated from a divine source, in other words, as being of indigenous origin. Prof. Julien Vinson says, "Tamil and Sanskrit in spite of some analogies of words have no connection whatever. Their grammatical systems so widely differ that they certainly proceed from quite different origins. They are only to one another what a cocoa tree would be to a carrot plant." It is thus clear that the Dravidian languages belong to a stock distinct from Sanskrit. Many Sanskrit words connected with the arts of peace were borrowed from the Dravidian. The Dravidian dialects affected profoundly the sounds, the structure, the idiom, and the vocabulary of Sanskrit. The Dravidian element makes its influence felt in the sounds employed not only in the Sanskritic vernaculars but to a certain extent in Sanskrit itself. The cerebral stops, so characteristic of Dravidian, are found even in the earliest Sanskrit. The existence of a Tamilian substratum in all the modern dialects of India and of the profound influence, which the classical Tamil has exercised on the formation and

development of both the vedic and the classical Sanskrit, is gradually coming to be recognised by students of Indian philology.

" Dravidian genius was conspicuous not merely in the sphere of language, but also in that of literature. Of all the races of India, the only people who had a poetical literature independent of Sanskrit are the Tamils, a typical Dravidian people." [1]

v. The Tamil Alphabet.

We shall now briefly deal with the Tamil Alphabet before we pass on to its Literature.

The Tamil Script—Vatteluttu.

The Tamil alphabet now in use is not what it was a thousand years ago. Its form appears to have undergone changes from century to century until about the fourteenth, when it reached the present stereotyped condition. There were, however, two different kinds of writing in use in the Tamil country—the one indigenous to the Tamil race and the other introduced by the Brahmans. The latter is known as the Grantha-Tamil alphabet, from which some of the modern Tamil characters have sprung, while the former is called by palaeographists as the *Vatteluttu* or the Cera-Pandya alphabet. But the introduction of all these did not take place at one and the same period.

Its origin.

The introduction of the *Vatteluttu* alphabet must have taken place long before the fourth or fifth century B.C., and this approximates the earliest date assigned by European scholars to the introduction of writing in India, which was the seventh or eighth century before the Christian era. As to who first brought the alphabet

[1] *The Ancient Dravidians* by T. R. Sesha Iyengar, pp. 36-44.—While some may not agree with everything Mr. Sesha Iyengar has written, it has to be conceded that there is a large measure of truth in his statements which are based on careful and extensive study. A language, however, cannot afford to remain static, particularly when there is a high-pressure effort to carve out for the nation a place among the peoples of the modern industrialised and scientific world. It has to grow and borrow and adapt foreign words without false pride or narrow bigotry. But there is much loose talk on importing wholesale foreign terms, and against this it may be pointed out that the law is not only of " the old yielding place to new " but also one of recovery and remodelling of the old to suit the new conditions. In this connection, the science of semantics, which has not been used as much as it could have been, could be pressed into service. Ultimately, the common people are the fathers of the language, and they use semantics day in, day out, though entirely ignorant of the term.—(P)

T.S., pp. 114, 115 and 119,

from the western Semitics—whether the Southern Dravidians or the Northern Aryans—it is not quite easy to settle.

Dr. Burnell seems to think that *Vatteluttu* had an independent source and had nothing to do with the Brahmi alphabet of Northern India. 'This alphabet,' he says, 'was formed and settled' before the Indo-Aryan grammarians of the Tamil language came to Southern India.

Although the Tamilians owed their grammar to *Agastya* and to *Tolkappiyar,* it should not be inferred that they were indebted to them for the art of writing also.

Among the Dravidian races of South India, the Tamils alone made use of the *Vatteluttu* alphabet from time immemorial, whilst their Telugu and Kanarese neighbours have, so far as epigraphical researches reveal, been using some alphabet or other which had its origin from the Brahmi of Upper India.

The vast difference that exists between Tamil and the Aryan languages in their vocabulary, between the Tamils and the Indo-Aryans, the contempt which the one had for the other, and the great antiquity and the divine origin which the Tamils claim for their 'sweet' language, and its grammar—all these seem to favour the indigenous origin of the Tamil *Vatteluttu* alphabet.

The *Vatteluttu* or the Tamil archaic alphabet is so called on account of its round or circular form like the modern Telugu alphabet, while its modern development has assumed the angular or, as some would say, square shape. This angularity was due to the facility in writing on palm leaves with an iron stylus, or in cutting on stones or copper plates with a chisel.

The Present-day Tamil Alphabet.

Let us now take the number, order, and pronunciation of the Tamil letters. There are thirty-one letters; twelve vowels and eighteen consonants; and one semi-vowel, represented by the symbol ஃ. The sound of it is midway between the Arabic *ghayn* and the Sanskrit ஹ ह. It is found in no other Indian or European languages, and it seems to suggest some connection of the Tamil race with the Semitic or Western Asiatic nations.

The other letters peculiar to Tamil are ழ, ள, ற, ன. The letter, ழ is equally a private property of Tamil and a terrible bugbear for Europeans to pronounce. It has been variously

T.S., pp. 120, 122, 124, 125, 131, 132 and 134.

transliterated in some of the European languages, by lj, zj, zh, rl, l, zy, etc.

The letter ற has the sound of a rough *r* and that of *tr*. The sounds of ந (Hindi न) and ன are almost identical and it may be supposed that the second is redundant. But their origin shows a slight variation and justifies the necessity for the existence of both, because ந is a dental while ன is a palatal letter.

The Tamil consonants comprise only the unaspirate hard consonants, nasals, and semi-vowels. There are no separate symbols for aspirate hard consonants, but the sounds are pronounced by the combination of the cerebral stop of a consonant and its vowel consonant, and are written accordingly. Tamil words do not begin with such sounds. There are, moreover, no hard-consonant sibilants or unaspirate or aspirate soft-consonants. The sounds are, however, pronounced in speech and reading. The story of how cannot be told here.

vi. History of the Tamil Language.

Coming now to the history of the Tamil language, it may conveniently be divided into three periods, namely, (1) the early Tamil, comprising the period between the sixth century before and after Christ ; (2) the Mediæval Tamil, occupying the interval between the sixth century and the twelfth century ; and (3) the Modern Tamil, extending from the twelfth down to the present day. We shall briefly indicate the characteristics of each period.

Early Tamil

Early Tamil was the language used by the writers of the academic and the classic periods. And the peculiarities of this Tamil may be observed in the literature of those times, the important of which being the *Ahananuru*, the *Purananuru*, the *Pattuppattu*, the *Padirruppattu*, the *Silappadikaram* and the *Manimekalai*. The standard grammars of the epoch were the *Tolkappiyam*, *Pannirupadalam*, *Usimuri*, etc.

Words of foreign origin were never introduced, notwithstanding the commercial intercourse of the Tamils with the Greeks, the Romans, and the Arabs, whom they indiscriminately called the Yavanas. Sanskrit words were very sparingly used and even these were mutilated in their form. For instance, it is calculated that in the *Pattuppattu* there are only about 2% of Sanskrit words.

T.S., pp. 172, 173 and 174.

The literature of this period is all poetry—simple blank verse, in chaste classic style, devoid of rhetorical flourishes, figures of speech, hyperbolic descriptions, and intricacies of later prosody which mar the excellence of modern Tamil poems; *asiriyappa, kalippa, venba,* and *vanjippa* are the metres mostly used. The descriptions of events and scenery are all faithful and true to nature.

The subject-matter of most of these works is the panegyric of reigning kings, descriptive of their military prowess, their liberality, and their administration. Some of them depict poverty, chiefly of bards, in a very pathetic manner. Some are on morality, while only a few relate to religion.

Mediaeval Tamil.

The Mediæval Tamil period embraces the Brahmanic and the sectarian periods of Tamil literature. The early part of it was one of struggle for predominance between Brahmanism on the one hand and Buddhism and Jainism on the other, in which the former came out triumphant, Buddhism being deprived of following in this land and Jainism crippled. The literature of this epoch consists of hymns to Siva and Vishnu and of the accounts of the life and adventures of Siva and Subrahmanya, Rama and Krishna, and Jina. The standard works on Tamil grammar during this period were *Tolkappiyam, Virasoliyam,* Nambi's *Ahapporul, Neminadam,* etc.

Sanskrit words, chiefly relating to religion, were largely introduced, and some of the Tamil words and forms current in the preceding epoch gave way to new ones.

For poetry or metrical composition, which was still the only form of literary production, *asiriyam* and *venba* metres were not so much in favour as the *viruttam, tandakam* and others of Sanskrit prosody. These were introduced with their *alankaras* or embellishments. Rhyme and *antadi* forms were introduced to render the recital of sacred songs easier. As for their style, the pure simplicity and the natural beauty of the academic period were gone. Affectation and artificiality even in excess were considered a literary excellence. As it was a period of struggle for religious supremacy every one of the four sects attempted to excel the rest by extolling and exaggerating its own doctrines, and by fabricating miracles to support them. Truth was thrown

T.S., pp. 176-179.

in the background and its place was taken up by mythological accounts of preter-natural events, such as one might find in the *puranas* and *itihasas*. Thus *Chintamani*, the *Ramayana*, the *Kandapurana*, the *Tiruvilayadalpurana*, the *Periyapurana* and the *Mahabharata* came to be replete with stories of this kind. However, a true spirit of devotion and piety, though blind or fanatical it might appear to us, pervaded the writings of this very troublous period.

To the Tamils the modern period which begins from the thirteenth century is important in every respect. The ancient kingdoms of the Colas and the Pandyas were subverted. A powerful Telugu empire was coming into existence on the banks of the Tungabhadra, which before the close of the fifteenth century absorbed all the Tamil kingdoms. Then came the Mahratta and the Musalman hordes from the north, and lastly the Europeans from beyond the sea.

Modern Tamil.

Till about the end of the seventeenth century the Tamil countries were ruled by Hindu governors. Brahmanical influence was in the ascendant. The learning of Sanskrit, Tamil and Telugu was encouraged. Several original works in all these languages were written, besides innumerable commentaries in Tamil as well as in Sanskrit on ancient works, especially on the *Nalayira Prabhandam*,—all tending to harden and aggravate the sectarian . . . . animosities, until a reaction set in during the succeeding period of Musalman despotism. Then for about half-a-century there was a lull, which was followed by the production of anti-Brahmanical, Christian and Islamic literatures. And it was only during the first half of the last century that the vernacular literature began to revive.

With the change in government, religion and social customs many Tamil words had gone out of use giving way to new ones.

Most of the revenue and judicial terms, names relating to office furniture and stationery, and generally most words relating to the administrative machinery are Arabic, Persian or English. The religious terms, of course, are all Sanskrit.

There is nothing new in the grammar of this period, perhaps with the exception of a leaning towards a greater use of Sanskrit and foreign words by the educated classes ; and the unconscious

T.S., pp. 181, 192.

creeping in of several English words in the home-speech of the English educated Tamilians.

Poetry was the only medium of literary expression of thought in Tamil till about the beginning of the last century, excepting of course, the extensive commentaries and copious notes on ancient poems. However, the natural ease and beauty of the writings of the academic and the hymnal periods were gone. The *kalambakam, malai, antadi, pillai-tamil, parani, ula, kovai* and *thoodu* were the different kinds of poesy adopted for shorter literary compositions, and the *kavya* (*kappiyam*) form for longer and more descriptive works like the *puranas.* For these quasi-religious compositions all kinds of metres enumerated in the grammar books on prosody were freely made use of.

vii. Tamil Literature—Its Classification.

Among the Dravidian tribes of South India, the Tamils were the first to cultivate a literature.

Indian grammarians have divided Tamil literature into three classes, namely—*Iyal* (belles-lettres), *Isai* (Music) and *Natakam* (Drama). As this essay is concerned mainly with the literature of the *Iyal* Tamil, it will not be inopportune to first briefly say something about the *Isai* and the *Natakam* or *Kuttu,* before we proceed to our subject.

Iyal, Isai, Natakam.

Tradition says that Agastya was the only grammarian who wrote complete treatises on the grammar of all the three classes of Tamil, but none of them are now extant. During the early centuries of the Christian era attention seems to have been paid by the Tamils to all the three. They had their own dances and music—vocal and instrumental. They developed the art of dancing to a high degree of perfection and many treatises were written on this fine art ; even their gods had their characteristic favourite dances.

Music too, was in a state of perfection, and their *pans* of tunes were *sui generis* to the Tamil race. The only ancient Tamil work of the nature of the drama that has come down to us is the *Silappadikaram* (third century). It gives a vivid description of the stage, the actor, the singer, the drummer, the flute-player, the yal-player and others of the troupe ; and contains beautiful

T.S., *pp.* 183 and 185.

specimens of *Vari, Kuravi, Ammanai, Usal, Kandukam, Vallai,* and other classes of musical songs.

A brief description of the *yal* [1], a stringed musical instrument, similar to the guitar, peculiar only to the ancient Tamils may not be uninteresting. It was of four kinds, viz., *Per-yal, Makara-yal, Sakotayal* and *Senkottiyal*. *Per-yal* had 21 strings; a *Makarayal,* 17; *Sakota-yal,* 16; and *Sengottu-yal,* 7. Perhaps these were the instruments in use during the days of Ilango-adigal. And the *per-yal*—big '*yal*'—which is supposed to have been in use in the days of Agastya had become extinct even before the third century A.D. It is said to have had one thousand strings.

The works on music, dancing, and the drama written by ancient Tamils, were neglected and left to shift for themselves; and by the time of Adiyarkunallar (about 1200 A.D.) most of them were lost. With them the Dravidian music and dances became practically extinct. No one can now say what those *pans* and dances were like. Their places were gradually taken up by the Indo-Aryan *ragams* and *natyams*.

During festivals and processions of gods, dancing was encouraged and plays were acted to draw large crowds of devotees. Hundreds of dancing girls or *gandharvis* were attached to every important temple. This was the origin of the institution of singing by *Oduvans* and *Araivans,* and the public representation of *natakas, pallus* and *kuravanjis* in Hindu temples. Of these the first alone now survives. The same institution was carried to the West Coast, and it now survives in the Chakkiyar *kuttu*. It was only during the eighteenth century that drama and music began to revive; and Arunachala Kavi (A.D. 1712-1779) the famous author of *Rama Natakam* may justly be called the father of modern dramatic literature, and under the Mahratta Rajas of Tanjore, a fresh impetus was given to music.

Classsification of literature of Iyal-Tamil.

We shall now come to the classification of *Iyal*. The following table [2] gives a tolerably accurate outline of the important stages in the progress of Tamil literature. As has already been explained religion pervades almost the whole of every literature in India, and the table therefore exhibits the several periods of the religious history also.

[1] The 'l' in *yal* should be pronounced like 'zh'.
[2] of Mr. Srinivasa Aiyangar, *T.S.* p. 211.
T.S., pp. 187-189, 190 and 191.

Period	Religion	Literature	Language
B.C. 600-200	Animistic	I Academic (*Tolkappiyam*, *Kural*, etc.)	I Early Grammar: *Agastyam*, *Tolkappiyam*
B.C. 200—A.D. 150	Buddhist	II Classic (or Epic) (*Silappadikaram*, *Manimekalai*, etc.)	
A.D. 150-500	Jaina.		
A.D. 500-950	Brahmanic	III Hymnal (*Tevaram*, *Tiruvasagam*, *Tiruvaymoli*, etc.)	II Mediæval Grammar: *Tolkappiyam* *Kalladam*, *Virasoliyam*.
A.D. 950-1200	Sectarian	IV Translations (Kamban's *Ramayana*, Kachiyappa's *Kandapuranam*, etc.)	
A.D. 1200-1450	Reformatory	V Exegetical (Commentaries by Nacchinarkiniyar, Adiyarkunallar Parimelalagar etc.)	III Modern Grammar: *Virasoliyam* and *Nannul*
A.D. 1450-1850	Modern	VI Miscellaneous	

viii. The Sangams.

The real history of Tamil literature begins with the Tamil Sangam (Academies) which lasted from B.C. 500 to A.D. 500. This millennium might perhaps appear to be a very long period; but during the first half of it none of the extant Tamil works, probably with the exception of *Tolkappiyam* and one or two others, were written.

The ancient classics of the Tamil people frequently refer to sangams or societies of learned men. "The word 'Sangam',[1]

[1] V. R. Ramachandra Dikshitar states (pp. 21) that the early poem where there is a reference to this institution is the Maduraikanchai * (line 762).

* (One of the poems in *Pattupattu*, a work of the Third Sangam era.) *T.S.*, pp. 211 and 212.

used by Buddhists and Jains for a religious order or coterie, came to supersede," writes the late Mr. Purnalingam Pillai, "on the score of its euphony, the expression, '*Kuttam* which is Tamil, and the presence of poets of the Buddhists or Jain persuasion in the third academy in modern Madura (Madhurai, since 1948) accounts for it. Madura bears the name of *Kudal,* for the reason that the poetic academy met there."

The Sangam was a body, not perhaps with a charter, etc. in the beginning, of the most learned men of the time, whose chief function, like that of the French Academy, was the promotion of literature. The name 'academy', therefore, seems to be appropriate to this institution and is therefore used in the following pages.

According to Tamil writers there were three sangams in the Pandya country at different periods.

Three Sangams.

Of the three academies the second was more or less continuous with the first, and both probably existed sometime between the fifth century B.C. and second century A.D., while the third, and the most important of them all seems to have lasted till A.D. 500, or, to put it more precisely, could not have lasted beyond A.D. 500. For, "most of the inscriptions now available date from roughly A.D. 600 by which time it is probable that the sangam as an active institution had ceased to exist. Hence they had no occasion to mention it and did not mention it."[1]

The earliest literary activity of the Tamilians could have shown itself only after the introduction of writing in South India, which must have taken place long before the fourth century B.C. We shall not therefore be wrong if we look for the foundation of the first Tamil Academy or Sangam somewhere between the sixth and fourth centuries before the Christian era.

Pre-academic Literature.

Tamil literature of course did not begin only with the founding of Academies as indicated in the table. This was preceded by what may be called the pre-academic period. But to attempt an account of it will be groping in the dark, as all literary evidence we now possess relates either to the academic or to the post-academic period. Some Tamil scholars still believe that Agastya invented the Tamil alphabet. This is certainly erroneous. The use of pure Tamil words like *Eluthu* and *Suvadi* by Agastya proves unmistakably the existence of the Tamil alphabet and the use of books

[1] *D.*, p. 7. *T.S.*, pp. 211 and 212.

among the Tamils long before his days. And even the compilation of the first grammar for this language by this Aryan sage, after the Sanskrit model, is an argument in favour of the pre-existence of literature among the Tamils of antiquity. That literature always precedes grammar is a stern philological fact recognized by Agastya and later grammarians.

It is therefore almost certain that some sort of literature and also good poets must have existed before the academic era; but nothing can at present be asserted about it in the absence of any literary or other records.

Regarding the First Academy, we have no reliable particulars on which we could base any conclusions regarding its date of inception or its members.

The First Sangam.

Nor have any of the writings attributed to this academy come down to us in their entirety, excepting probably a few doubtful quotations from *Agastyam* and one or two others. Apparently all these had been lost long before the tenth or eleventh century.

The only authors of this period about whom any account, however scanty it might be, can be extracted from Tamil literature are Agastya and Murinjiyur Mudinagarayar. The rest of the members seem to be half mythical persons. The life of Agastya is clothed in myth; but this much is certain that he was a Brahman of North India and that he led the first colony of Brahmans which settled in the Tamil districts.

He is said to have had twelve students. Chief of them, Tolkappiyar, was also a member of the second academy like his renowned master.

The identification of *Ten* (South) Madura, the seat of the first Academy has been a controversial point. Regarding the destruction of this place there are certain allusions both in the Madura *Stalapurana* and in the *Silappadikaram.* The learned commentator of the latter work writes as follows: 'Between the rivers *Kumari* and *Pahruli* there existed an extensive continent occupying an area of 700 *Kavadams* (a *Kavadam* being equal to ten miles). This land consisting of forty-nine *nads* (inclusive of Kollam and Kumari), innumerable forests, mountains and rivers had been submerged in the Indian Ocean as far as the peaks of Kumari, by a terrific convulsion which resulted in the upheaval of the Himalayan range.' Geological, ethnological and linguistic researches also seem to confirm the above theory.

T.S., pp. 237, 240 and 241.

To arrive at the date of the Second Academy is equally difficult.

The Second Sangam.

Mr. V. R. Ramachandra Dikshitar argues (pp. 21-D) : "If the author of the *Tirukkural* could be proved to have lived in the second century B.C., then there is warrant for the assumption that the *Tolkappiyam* is a much earlier work, at least one or two centuries earlier than the second century B.C. According to the *Payiram* to the *Tolkappiyam* the latter was presented to the Academy and won its approval. If this account has any significance, it compels us to conclude that prior to the days of Tolkappiyanar the Sangam existed as an institution and the Grammarian did what the scholars of his time did. It must be also borne in mind that the grammar of Tolkappiyanar or his illustrious predecessor Agattiyanar presupposes a body of literary works. Roughly then, a date like the fifth century B.C. may be assigned in regard to the origin of the Sangam." (First.) He adds a foot-note "Professor V. Rangachariar's researches have led him to this conclusion."

It is said that the seat of the second Sangam was Kavatapuram. The transfer of the headquarters from *Ten* Madura to Kavatapuram and from the latter city to the modern city of Madura (seat of the third Sangam) is probably a historical fact. The former two sites are said to have been overwhelmed and submerged by two different incursions of the sea.

Change of Venue.

The only work of the Second Sangam which has come down to us is the *Tolkappiyam*. Nothing further is known about Tolkappiyar, than that he was a student of Agastya and that he lived in a village near Madura during the reign of the Pandya king Makirti. All the works of this academy have also been irretrievably lost, except the above work and a few poems which luckily found their way into the anthologies compiled at the third academy.

We shall now pass on to the third Sangam which was by far the most important, and about which we are particularly concerned. Almost all the best Tamil classics we now possess are the productions of this last Sangam. Nothing definite can be said about the foundation of the third Sangam except that it had its seat at the modern Madura.

The Third Sangam.

T.S., pp. 244 and 245.

A comparison of these ancient institutions of the Tamil people with the modern Royal Academy of the French will be interesting, since both of them were alike in their constitution, work and influence. The French Academy was established in A.D. 1635, that is nearly two thousand years after the first Tamil Academy, and its members were fixed at forty. Its object was to cleanse the language of the impurities, which had crept into it through the common people who spoke it and to render it pure, eloquent and capable of treating the arts and sciences . . . . It has done much by its example for style and has raised the general standard of writing, though it has tended to hamper and crush originality.

Language has life and growth, and when left to itself sprouts out into divers dialects like the branches of a living tree. "The bit and bridle of literature" says Max Muller, "will arrest a natural flow of language in the countless rivulets of its dialects, and give a permanency to certain formations of speech which, without these external influences, could have enjoyed but an ephemeral existence". This linguistic principle was clearly understood and fully recognised by the founders of the Tamil academies. To secure, therefore, permanency to the Tamil language, the boundaries of the country where it was current were roughly described and the particular locality in which pure Tamil (*Sen-Tamil*) was spoken was sharply defined; then the form and pronunciation of letters were settled; rules were laid down to distinguish pure Tamil words from those of foreign origin, and to determine the structure and combination of words in sentences. These and many other restrictions on the free growth of the language were dealt with in the first Tamil grammar. Treatises were written on prosody, rhetoric and *Porul* (details of conduct in matters of love and warfare). Poetical dictionaries or *nikhandus* were compiled in order to check the indiscriminate and unlicensed introduction of alien words in the Tamil vocabulary. The canons of literary criticism were severe and were applied impartially.

In this way the Tamil language, which passed through the crucible of the three academies, was refined and given to the Tamil-land as a perfect instrument for the expression of the best thoughts and sentiments of its people. The influence of these academies is markedly seen in the Tamil writings which received their approval, their style and language and choice of words differing much from that of the Tamil works of the post-academic period.

T.S., pp. 257, 259, 260 and 261.

For the advancement of literature and academies the Tamil kings did much. Liberal presents in the shape of money, elephants, palanquins, chariots with horses, lands, and flowers of gold were bestowed upon deserving poets. Titles of distinction were also conferred on them. Instances of the Tamil kings honouring poets, and of their indirectly encouraging them are only too many.

ix. The Extant Sangam Works.

According to the tradition which finds a mention in the famous commentary on the *Iraiyanar Ahapporal* the following are given as the accredited works of the first Sangam: *Paripadal*, *Mudunarai*, *Mudukurugu*, and *Kalariyavirai*.

First Sangam Works.

Since *narai* and *kuruhu* are suffixed to the titles of works, it is reasonable to conclude that they were musical treatises, and ancient Tamil land developed the arts of music and dancing besides literary activities.

It is generally believed that works of the first Sangam are lost, perhaps, beyond recovery. The extant *Paripadal* may be the composition of the third Sangam rather than that of the first.

The works attributed to the second Sangam are *Kali*, *Kuruhu*, *Vendali*, *Viyalamalai Ahaval*, *Agattiyam*, *Tolkappiyam*, *Mapuranam*, *Isainunukkam*, and *Budapuranam*, the last five being grammatical compositions.

Second Sangam Works.

With regard to the compositions of the second Academy, we have to take it that all of them except *Tolkappiyam* have been lost. Tolkappiyam was the grammar during the period of the second and third Academies.

Tolkappiyam, the life-work of its author, is in three parts and counts 1,612 *sutras*. It is the oldest extant Tamil grammar, the name signifying 'ancient book' or 'the preserver of ancient institutions'. It was preceded by centuries of literary culture, for it lays down rules for different kinds of poetical compositions, deduced from examples furnished by the best authors whose works had been in existence.

It treats clearly and systematically of only one of the three time-honored divisions of Tamil, viz., *Iyal* or Natural Tamil. The three parts of it are *Eluthu* (Orthography), *Sol* (Etymology), and *Porul* (Matter), each with nine sections.

T.S., p. 260, *D.* pp. 24 and 25. *P.* p. 23.

While the *Eluttadikaram* and the *Solladikaram* are interesting from both linguistic and philological points of view, the *Poruladikaram* is most valuable as it gives us a glimpse of the political, social and religious life of the people during the period when *Tolkappiyar* lived.

It is the only work from which we can have a gleaning of the ancient Tamilar's manners and customs.

(*a*) ELUTHU : The first part deals with Letters, i.e., Orthography.

(*b*) SOL : The second part on Words is masterly in treatment. In this the author has attempted at finding the root meanings of words. It is a peculiarity—a peculiarity which will show the critical culture of the Tamilar—that the gender classification is based on the signification of words.

(*c*) PORUL : The third part, *Poruladikaram* is valuable as it gives us a glimpse of the political, social and religious life of the people during the period when Tolkappiyar lived.

We have already pointed out that the Tamil language is classified under three broad sections, viz., *Iyal* (Natural), *Isai* (Music) and *Natakam* (Drama). There are a few other classifications, reference to which will be frequently made in this essay ; and it is well that we mention the classifications here.

(*a*) The subject-matter of the work is classified as—

(i) *Aham*.

(ii) *Puram*.

(*b*) The land which the works treat of is classified into :

(i) Kurinchi (mountain regions),

(ii) Palai (desert),

(iii) Mullai (jungle),

(iv) Neithal (beach or coastal region), and

(v) Marutham (fields ; *i.e.*, land brought under cultivation, or more generally speaking, the plains).

These classifications are well explained in the following quotation from *Tamil Literature* by the late Mr. Purnalingam Pillai :

" PORUL (substance, subject, matter) is divided into *Aham* (inner) and *Puram* (outer). Of these *Aham*, the Subjective, treats of love, its various emotions, and incidents ; and *Puram*, the Objective, relates to all other things—life in general, and especially war and the affairs of the State.

D. p. 26. P. p. 25.

(*i*) *Aham.* Love is true or natural, when mutual affection draws the parties together, and untrue or unnatural when it is one-sided (*kaikilai*) or ill-assorted and morganatic or forced (*perum thinai*). True love is considered under five aspects, *viz.*, union (*punarthal*), separation (*pirithal*), patience in separation (*irutthal*), bewailing (*irangal*), and sulking or going into a pet (*udal*), and these are made to fit in with the five-fold physiographical divisions (*thinai*). Further, it is made to turn on the six divisions of the year (August to July) viz., cloudy (*kar*), cold (*kuthir*), early dew (*mun-pani*), late dew (*pin-pani*), spring (*ila-venil*), and summer (*muthuvenil*), and on the six divisions of the day; viz., the first hours of night (*malai*), midnight (*yamam*), the small hours of night (*vaikarai*), morning (*kalai*), noon (*nanpakal*), and evening (*erpadu*). Besides these, the natural peculiarities of each of the five *thinais* are made to bear on the aspect of love peculiar to it. Such peculiarities are comprised under fourteen heads, viz., deities (*ar-anangu*), nobles (*uyarnthore*), the vulgar (*ilinthore*), birds (*pull*), beasts (*vilangu*), town (*oor*), water (*neer*), flowers (*poo*), trees (*maram*), food (*vunavu*), drum (*parai*), lyre (*yal*), tune (*pan*) and occupation (*tholil*). Love, again, is wedded (*karpu*), or furtive (*kalavu*); and furtive love leads to wedlock or the grave, for the rejected lovers cannot bear life without love. Marriage was solemnised by the parents on the self-choice of the lovers, and marital rites came into vogue when aliens proved untrue in their courtship. This is a bare outline of *Aham*, and commentators find in it an allegory of the different stages through which the soul of man passes from its appearance in the body to its final absorption in the Supreme.

(*ii*) *Puram*, whose subject is war and state, consists of seven divisions, the first five of which correspond to the five-fold division of true love, and the last two correspond to *kaikilai* and *perum-thinai*. The seven divisions of puram, with their corresponding divisions of Aham, are as follows:—

1.	*Vetchi*, cattle-raid,	corresponds to	*Kurinchi.*
2.	*Vanchi*, invasion,	do.	*Mullai.*
3.	*Ulinai*, siege,	do.	*Marutham.*
4.	*Thumbai*, war	do.	*Neithal.*
5.	*Vahai*, victory,	do.	*Palai.*
6.	*Kanchi*, sober counsel	do.	*Perum-thinai.*
7.	*Padan*, encomium,	do.	*Kaikilai.*

P. pp. 25-27.

Cattle-raiding is the beginning of warfare. It leads to systematic invasions of the raiders' territories. Then comes the siege, upon which the war proper begins. The war ends in victory to one party or the other, and the victor and the vanquished are counselled respectively to be sober, without being intoxicated with success, and to be calm and resigned, without being over-powered by grief. The loyal subjects of the victor pay him their joyful tribute of laudatory odes or encomia.

A brief note on the language of flowers will close this bird's-eye view of Tholkappiam. [Vetchi, Vanchi, etc., are also names of flowers ; garlands made from the respective flower are worn by the King when he sets out on the type of warfare indicated by the name.] *Vetchi,* the country geranium or 'flame of the forest,' bears a profusion of bright, deep-red flowers, which are associated in idea with bloody action. *Vanchi,* a creeping plant, bears yellow flowers and is green all the year round. It is a symbol of inexhaustible energy. *Ulinai* is a species of cotton plant whose shoots are golden, and a wreath of which is worn in derision as emblematic of the weak and worthless fort besieged. *Thumbai,* called in Sanskrit *drona,* is the essential war-flower, and a wreath of it is worn when a king contemplates an offensive war. *Vahai* (mimosa flectuosa) bears white flowers, and a wreath of its leaves and flowers is worn by a king who returns home after a glorious victory.

The importance of Tolkappiyam is further enhanced by several commentators among whom figure (1) Ilampuranar, (2) Per-Asiriyar, (3) Senavarayar, (4) Nacchinarkiniyar, (5) Daivac-cilaiyar, (6) Kalladar.

Third Sangam Works.

While no works of the First Sangam have come down to us, and the Second Sangam is represented by *Tolkappiyam* alone, we are more lucky with the Third Sangam.

In addition to the tradition transmitted in the commentary on the *Iraiyanar Ahapporul,* we have other traditions all of which mark the following as the accredited works of this Sangam : the *Ettutogai,* the *Pattuppattu* and the *Padinen-kilk-kanakku,* all which have come down to us today. *Kuttu, Vari, Sirrisai, Perisai,* etc., are others which are now only names to us, the works themselves having been lost long since.

Space forbids us to offer anything but the briefest notice on the major works of the third Sangam.

D., p. 26.

The **Ettutogai** comprises: *Narrinai, Kuruntogai, Aingurunuru, Padirruppattu, Paripadal, Kalittogai, Neduntogai, Purananuru* and *Pattupattu.*

The **Narrinai** contains 401 stanzas, each ranging from nine to twelve lines. In it we find the hands of 175 poets. The verses deal with the five *thinais*, 28 on *mullai*, 32 on *marudam*, 107 on *palai*, 103 on *neithal* and 120 on *kurinji*. Its general theme is love and its compilation was at the instance of a Pandyan king, Pannadutanda Pandiyan Maran Valudi.

The **Kuruntogai** literally means a collection of short poems. In this work is brought together a number of verses attributed to as many as 205 poets. This collection contains 402 stanzas in the *ahaval* metre, each stanza ranging from four to eight lines. As in the *Narrinai* the theme of the work is love and the stanzas can be brought under the category of the five *thinais*. It would appear that the compilation of the extant work was effected under the patronage of the chieftain of Puri (identified with North Malabar) by name Purikko. There was an ancient gloss on the work by the well-known commentator Per-Asiriyar which has since become lost.

Nacchinarkiniyar has written a gloss on twenty verses only, because, in all probability, the other gloss existed in his time.

The **Aingurunuru** means literally the short five hundred. It contains 500 *ahaval* verses and the whole book can be conveniently divided into five parts, each part consisting of 100 stanzas. Each verse contains three to six lines. Every part again deals with five *thinais.*

Orambagiyar, Ammuvanar, Kapilar, Odalandaiyar, and Peyanar, are said to be the respective authors of hundred verses each on *marudam, neithal, kurinji, palai,* and *mullai thinais* respectively. In the case of this work, however, the name of the compiler is known as Kudalur Kilar.

The **Padirruppattu** (the Ten Tens) is an anthology of enormous importance. Here we are introduced to a number of kings of the Cera dynasty, with a splendid record of their deeds and achievements thus enabling us to get at a true picture of the political conditions of Tamil land about two thousand years ago. Of the ten books into which the whole work is divided, the first and the last are not available to us.

The **Paripadal** (literally stanzas of strophic metre) is according to tradition a composition of the first Academy as well as the third Academy. If both are different works, the first Sangam work is lost. The *Paripadal* of the third Academy is said to consist of seventy stanzas attributed as usual to multifarious poets. It is unfortunate that as many as forty-six verses of this important work are lost. There is an ancient commentary of Parimelalagar which has been printed with the available texts by Mahamahopadhyaya U. V. Swaminatha Aiyar.

The **Kalittogai**, otherwise known as *Kurunkalittogai* or simply *Kali* is yet another important work of this category. It contains one hundred and fifty stanzas in the *kali* metre dealing with the five *thinais*. Its theme is love but it also contains a number of moral

D., pp. 26-31.

maxims. Incidentally it furnishes us with some peculiar marriage customs current in those ancient days. Kadungon, Kapilar, Marudan Ilanaganar, Cola Nalluttiran and Nallanduvanar are the poets who composed the various songs in the work. We have no *prima facie* evidence as to the name of the compiler and the patron at whose instance the work was compiled. But it is generally believed that one of the five poets, Nallanduvanar, was the compiler. The celebrated commentator Nacchinarkiniyar has written a gloss on it.

The **Neduntogai**, otherwise known as *Ahappattu* and popularly known as *Ahananuru* or simple *Aham* is an anthology of sufficient importance and value to a student of ancient Tamil culture. It contains 401 stanzas in the *ahaval* metre and is divided into three sections—*Kallirriyanai-nirai* of 121 stanzas, *Manimidaipavalam* of 180 stanzas and *Nittilakkovai* of 100 stanzas. Its general theme is love. The length of the stanzas varies from thirteen to thirty-seven lines. As many as 145 names of poets are given in this collection whose compiler was Uruttirasarman, the son of Uppurikudi Killar of Madura. It was accomplished under the distinguished auspices of the Pandyan king Ukkirapperuvaludi.

The **Purananuru** otherwise known as *Purappattu* or simply *Puram* is a valuable anthology of 400 stanzas in *ahaval* form. It is the counterpart of the preceding work, the *Ahananuru,* and deals with aspects of ancient Tamil culture and forms a good record of the Tamil civilization in ancient times. It deals with war and matters of state. There is a view that the work is a later compilation inasmuch as the name of Poygaiyar, a poet of Post-Sangam days is mentioned among the poets referred to in the *Puram.* It also contains the poems of Murinjiyur Mudinagarayar, Vanmikiyar, and others who, according to the legends, belong to the first Academy. Thus the anthology contains odes ranging from the epoch of the First Sangam to that of Post-Sangam. Whatever may be the date of its compilation, the events it treats of are ancient and hence invaluable to an antiquarian.

The **Pattuppattu** is a collection of ten idylls. An idyll is a short poem descriptive of some picturesque scene or incident, chiefly in pastoral life. It is not known by whom and when, these poems written at different times were brought together. The poems are by various authors.

Five of them belong to a peculiar class called *Arruppadai.* An *arruppadai* is a poem in which a bard or ministrel is recommended to go to a patron to solicit help from him. It is addressed to another seeker for favours by one who has already benefited munificently at the hands of the patron. Only one of them differs from the others, viz., Tirumuruharruppadai, which directs devotees not to a patron but to a God.

The following is an attempt to name them in a probable time order, and to give a brief account of them.[1]

[1] This arrangement and description are given by J. V. Chelliah in his *Pattupattu* (General Publishers Ltd., Colombo), an excellent rendering in English verse.

1. *Porunararruppadai* (lit. A Poem of Recommendation to a Bard) was composed by Mudattamakanniar. The poet recommends Karikala Colan to a bard as a patron of literature. It contains 248 lines.

2. *Pattinapalai* (lit. [a song of a-] City and Separation) was written by Uritthirankannanar. It is based on a contemplated separation of a husband from his wife. It is a poem of 301 lines.

It testifies to the growing prosperity of Kaviripattinam under the benevolent rule of Karikala Colan. The real value of the poem consists in giving us an idea of the trade relations of Tamil land with foreign countries, its busy mart, and some administrative details of importance.

3. *Mullaipattu* (lit. A jungle Song) was written by Napoothanar. It is generally supposed to have been written in praise of Neduncheliyan. It deals with a wife separated from her husband who is away in the battle-field. It contains 103 lines, and is the shortest of the Idylls.

4. *Perumpanarruppadai* (lit. A Poem of Recommendation to a Bard playing the larger yal) was written by the author of *Pattinapalai*. Kanchi and its king are celebrated in this Poem. It contains 500 lines.

5. *Sirupanarruppadai* (lit. A Poem of Recommendation to a Bard playing the smaller yal) was written by Natthathanar, and celebrates a chieftain. It contains 269 lines.

6. *Nedunalvadai* (lit. Good Long Cold Wind) was written, it is alleged, by the great poet, Nakkirar. Its subject-matter greatly resembles that of *Mullaipattu*. It has a fine description of the cold season, and contains 188 lines.

7. *Kurinchipattu* (lit. A Mountain Song) was written, it is supposed, by another great poet, Kapilar. It speaks of love at first sight, in the hilly region. It contains fine descriptions of mountain scenery, and has 261 lines.

It brings out the social conditions of the Tamil land in prominent relief. There is a legend grown round the origin of the composition of this poem, *viz.* to introduce a northern king Pirahattan to the beauties of Tamil literature.

8. *Maduraikanchi* (lit. A Song of Madura) was written by Mankudi Maruthanar. It was composed in praise of the Pandyan king, Neduncheliyan. It contains detailed descriptions of his kingdom, his administration, and Madura, his capital. It is the longest of the Idylls containing 782 lines.

9. *Malaipadukadam* (lit. The Secretion oozing from a Hill, and fig. The Echo of a Mountain) was composed by Perumkausikanar, and celebrates Nannan, a chieftain, and his court. It has beautiful descriptions of mountain scenery. It contains 583 lines.

10. *Tirumurugarruppadai* (lit. A Poem of Recommendation to the Shrine of Sacred Muruga) is supposed to have been written by Nakkirar. It contains description of the war-god, Muruga and his different shrines on the hills of South India. It depicts also the life of ancient Tamils. As a religious poem it is greatly valued by Saivites. It contains 317 lines.

If Tamil poetry is to be restored to its pristine spontaneity and charm, these ancient poems should be our models.

Historical Value of Pattuppattu.

These poems are valuable from another point of view. Tamil genius never paid much attention to the time element, and so historical and other documents from which we could gain an idea of ancient Tamil life are very much wanting. There are six sources of information for the reconstruction of the life of the people of those times : Tamil literary works, commentaries, accounts of foreigners, Ceylon records, inscriptions, and references in Sanskrit literature. Of these the most important are the Tamil poems of the period. Literature embalms the culture, the ideas and the ideals of the people of the age in which it is produced, and it is in its literary works that the springs of thought and actions of a period stand revealed. So, apart from the literary interest of these poems, they are a mine for reconstructing the life of the Tamils centuries ago.

The Eighteen Minor Works: The next collection of the Sangam works comes under the general heading—the *Padinen-kil-kanakku,* the eighteen poems dealing primarily with morals (Tamil *aram,* Sans. *dharma*).

They are :

1. Naladiyar	7. Ain-thinai-aimbathu	13. Thiri-kadukam
2. Nanmani-Kadikai	8. Ain-thinai-elupathu	14. Acarak-kovai
3. Kar-narppathu.	9. Thinai-moli-aimbathu	15. Palamoli
4. Kalavali-narppathu	10. Thinai-malai-nuth-aimbathu	16. Siru-pancha-mulam
5. Iniathu-narppathu	11. Kainnilai, Innilai	17. Muthu-moli-kanchi
6. Inna-narppathu	12. Tirukkural	18. Elathi

The term *kil-kanakku* implies that there was a classification like *mel-kanakku.* The works that contain less than fifty stanzas, composed in different metres, generally come under the *kil-kanakku.* But if the *venba* metre is pressed into service, the poem can be of any length and can still find a place in *kil-kanakku.* The *mel-kanakku* ranges from 50 to 500 stanzas and is in the ahaval, kalippa, and paripadal metres. The *Ettuttogai* and the *Pattuppattu* come under the category of *mel-kanakku.*

Two works like the *Naladiyar* and the *Tirukkural* which come under the category of *kil-kanakku* deal with the three *purusharthas* or objects of life, *dharma* or righteous living, (aram), *artha* or wealth or secular life (porul) and *kama* or love (inbam). The remaining sixteen deal both with *aham* and *puram,* the object aimed at being practice of *dharma* or morals.

The **Tirukkural** (popularly known as the *Muppal*) is the famous work of the celebrated Tiruvalluvar who lived in the early

centuries before the Christian era. The poem is in the form of couplets and deals with the three aims of human life—*aram, porul,* and *inbam.* It consists of 133 chapters, each containing ten kural-venbas. Each couplet is a gem by itself and conveys lofty thoughts couched in terse language. Though the scholarly commentary of the illustrious Parimelalagar—a happy consummation of Tamil and Sanskrit culture—is largely in use, there were nine equally well-known commentaries of which Manakkudavar's gloss is one. Till recently, this was the only one available of the nine. Two others (parts) are said to have been traced since.

A brief analysis of this universal code of morals is given below.

No. of Chapters.		*Subject.*	
BOOK I 34 Chapters			
	20	The Ideal Householder	—Domestic Virtue based on Affection.
	14	The Ideal Ascetic	—Ascetic or Higher Virtue based on Grace.
BOOK II 70 Chapters			
	25	The Ideal Sovereign	—Royalty.
	10	The Ideal Statesman	—Ministers of State.
	22	The Ideal State	—The Essentials of a State.
	13	The Ideal Citizen	—Morality, Affirmative and Negative.
BOOK III 25 Chapters	25	The Ideal Lover	—Furtive love ending in wedded love.

These are the seven ideals presented by this Prince of Moralists. Rendered into almost every important European language—English, French, German, and Latin—the Kural presents an ideal monarchy portrayed by this Citizen of the World within the limits of practicality and at the same time outdoing the *Republic* of Plato and the *Oceana* of Harrington. Almost free from the influx of Sanskrit words, the *Kural* shows the richness and power of the Tamil tongue.

We dare not say more, as an entire set of volumes can be written on this one book alone of the Tamilar. We may mention, in passing, that V. V. S. Aiyar has translated the work into

D. p. 38. *P.* pp. 75 and 76.

English with a keen insight into the meaning of the phrases used in the original.

The **Naladiyar** comes nearer the *Kural* than the others in this collection in point of subject-matter including the division of the subjects. It also deals with the three pursuits of human life. It contains forty chapters, each consisting of ten stanzas. This anthology, the composition of which can be attributed to different hands, owes its compilation to one Padumanar.

Space forbids us from giving any detailed description of the contents of the rest of the Eighteen Works which mostly deal with ethics.

It is interesting to note the swing in the themes of the works of the Third Sangam. The earlier books deal, like the ancient literature of other countries, with love and war, kings and chieftains, and Nature and her beauties. Slowly there is a change, and the Tamil writers become obsessed with ethical matters to the exclusion of everything else. While their writings are high and dignified, full of wisdom and guidance to the common man and savants as well, they, however, do not delight one as the earlier works do, and lack variety of themes. Life has turned inwards, and we can see in this the growing influence of certain trends which turned away India, at any rate the South, from a life of external activity and achievement to one of contemplative contentment.

We see side by side an insidious change in the attitude to women. From being brave mothers, ardent lovers, proud wives, and life-mates sharing equally in the family and state life, we find that women come to be spoken of as snares and temptations, as something to be feared and shunned. It would not be an exaggeration to say that in this debasement of women lay hidden the seeds of the debasement of the body politic of the people.

The reader would have noticed that many of the works of the Third Sangam are collections. This is significant of the fate that has pursued the Tamil works from ancient times. Time, the sea, war, famine, white ants and nature herself to which man has added his quota of apathy and neglect have combined to destroy the works which were written on *Cadjan* leaves. What remained has been gathered within these *togais*—collections—by the selfless compilers, whose very names are not known in many cases. But for them, these too would have been lost for ever to us. Even as they are, they would still have been lost to us, but for another

D. pp. 38 and 39.

great soul in this line of immortal compilers. The Tamilars have been laid under a great debt of gratitude by that great scholar and tireless compiler and learned editor of our days, Dr. U. V. Swaminatha Aiyar of whom we shall have to say more later on.

x. The Epic or Post-Sangam Literature

The chief of them are five, often referred to as *Ain-perum-Kappiyam*—the Five Major Epics. They are the *Silappadikaram*, the *Manimekalai*, the *Jivaka Chintamani*, the *Valayapati* and the *Kundalakesi*. A pleasing fancy has been coined from their names in which the works are conceived to be five principal ornaments on the form of *Tamil-anangu*—the Tamil Muse—the works symbolising the tinkling anklet, the gem-studded waist-girdle, the gem on the chaplet, the bangles, and ear-pendants respectively.

Ain-perum-Kappiyam.

The last two works are entirely lost to us. We can give only a brief sketch of the other three works.

Silappadikaram : Ilango-adigal is the celebrated author of the *Silappadikaram*. He was the second son of king Ceralatan reigning in the city of Vanji, the capital of the then Ceranadu and the younger brother of the famous king Ceran Senguttuvan. On this account, he was called Ilango or the younger prince and he was known as Ilango-adigal after his renunciation of royalty and assumption of holy orders.

The story of this Epic, according to its *payiram* (prefatory verses) preaches Dharma wreaking vengeance on those who failed in their kingly duties ; sings the praises of the highly virtuous wife ; and underlines the recoil of one's actions.

The story is simple and is as follows :

In Kavirippumpattinam, the capital of the Colas, there lived a wealthy merchant named Masattuvan. He had a son Kovalan to whom was married a virtuous and devoted lady Kannaki by name, the daughter of Manaikan. Being a wealthy young man, Kovalan moved in high social circles and took an active interest in the amusements of the day. Once his eyes fell on a beautiful young dancing girl Madavi by name, on whom he directed his love. He wasted all his wealth and money on this dancing girl and did not care for his devoted wife. When at last he had lost all his riches, he thought that Madavi's love towards him had cooled and he became disgusted. Returning home, he realised his past mistakes and resolved to follow the career of a merchant. The same night he left for Madura with his wife Kannaki. He had nothing to fall back upon except her jewels. She placed one of her costly *Silambus*—anklet—ungrudgingly and willingly at his disposal. He took it to the jeweller's market there to effect a sale. As misfortune would have it, he was arrested as a thief of the royal jewels. The king without inquiring into the facts of the case impatiently ordered his execution. It was done.

D. pp. 70, 77 and 78.

Poor Kannaki, when she came to know of this, became bewildered as it were. She went before the king and proved her husband's innocence beyond the shadow of a doubt. The Pandyan King Nedunjeliyan realised his guilt and could not bear it. He fell down from his seat broken-hearted and died immediately. Still Kannaki could not control herself and in a fit of great anger cursed that the whole city be consumed by flames. And so it happened. Kannaki then proceeded westward to the Malainadu (Hill country) and continued to do penance at the foot of a Vengai tree in the Neduvelkunram, a hill near Kodungolur (Cranganore) according to Adiyarkkunallar.

A source of information—Barring the legendary portions of the twin epics, the *Silappadikaram* and the *Manimekalai* are the unfailing sources of information for writing the history of the ancient Tamil-land. The first is a contribution by a royal author and may be relied upon for details as regards the life in courts, and the accounts of the kings mentioned therein. It is indeed a valuable mine of information for re-writing the history of the early Pandya, Cola, and Cera Kings. It shows the relation of the states with one another, not excluding North Indian states like Avanti and Magadha. It gives us a true picture of the social and religious life of the people of those days. The various fine arts, such as music and dancing, flourished on an extensive scale as literature itself did. It gives us also types of good and bad womanhood and the ruin of the innocent by the seduction of the latter. It shows how justice was rendered besides other details of administrative interest. These and several other things found mentioned are indeed valuable as throwing sufficient light on the history of the Tamils in the early centuries of the Christian era. This is a work which combines in it the three divisions of Tamil—*Iyal, Isai,* and *Natakam*—and Prose as well.

The **Manimekalai** is a sequel to *Silappadikaram,* and takes up the story from the death of Kannaki. The scheme as well as the plan of the story are simple.

While the story of the *Silappadikaram* is of such varied interest and is presented vividly like a dramatic representation, the story of the *Manimekalai* is narrowed down to the aimless adventures of a Buddhist Bhikshuni (nun), sectarian in outlook.

Madavi, on hearing of the death of Kovalan, renounced the world, and turned a Buddhist nun. She had a daughter named Manimekalai by Kovalan. She too became a nun. Once Udayakumaran, the son of the reigning king, saw her and fell in love with her and pursued her, but in vain. . . . She was then taken by a goddess to Manipallavadvipa where were enshrined the feet of the Buddha. Here she was told that the prince was her husband in a previous birth. Through the grace of the deity she got possession of a begging bowl which would be ever full and never empty.

D. pp. 79 and 81.

She then returned to Kavirippumpattinam and became fully engrossed in doing selfless social service, assuming the disguise of one Kayasandikai. But Udayakumaran came to know of this her new disguise. One day the real Kayasandikai herself was seen in the garden and the prince ran after her. This was noticed by her husband, who in a fit of jealous fury murdered the prince. The king had Manimekalai arrested and imprisoned but at the request of the queen, she was soon released. She then wandered throughout the land visiting several holy places. At last she settled at Kanchi performing penance and listening to discourses on the righteous laws promulgated by great teachers of various religions. The last years of her life were spent in that city in a Buddhist nunnery.

Its author is Sittalai Sattanar known also as Kulavanikan Sattanar and Sattanar in literature.

Sattanar seems to have been an accomplished writer. Simplicity of diction, easy flow of words, and a clear and perspicuous style, fecundity of thought, fineness of imagery, and richness of imagination are the chief characteristics of his writings. Besides the classical work *Manimekalai,* his contributions are to be found in the well-known collections of *Ettuttogai.*

A source of information. Since the discovery and publication of the *Manimekalai* by Mahamahopadhyaya, U. V. Swaminatha Aiyar, scholars have been at work on the subject. For, apart from its great literary value to students of Tamil literature, it is an invaluable source of information to the historical students as it contains a wealth of details regarding the political, social, and religious conditions and institutions prevalent about the beginning of the Christian era, when, it is generally accepted, this work was composed. That a mass of useful material lies buried in its pages is accepted even by acute critics.

Jivaka-Chintamani : The author of this work is Thirut-thakka-Thevar. He was born at Mailapur, and was a Jain. His fame rests on *Jivaka-Chintamani,* which, though based on a Sanskrit original, contains an expression of Jain doctrines and beliefs. Its other title, *Mudi-porul-thodar-nilai-seyyul,* suggests that it treats of the fourfold object of life and aim of a literary work, *viz.* virtue, wealth, pleasure, and bliss. It is the story of Jivaka from his birth to the attainment of bliss and has a commentary by Nacchinarkiniar. It is in 13 books or *Ilambakams* and contains 3145 stanzas. It is noted for its chaste diction and sublime poetry, rich in religious sentiment, full of reflections and remarks on the grounds of human action, and replete with information about the condition of the arts and customs of social life at the period of its composition. It will, therefore, interest the scholar, the poet, and the antiquary ; and there is a tradition

D. pp. 79 and 81. *P.* pp. 126 and 127.

current that Kamban's *Ramayanam* owes much of its excellence and many of its beauties to this memorable Epic.

The Five Minor Epics.

The above five works are called the Five Major Epics. There were also other works of which the most important are five, called the Five Minor Epics or *Ain-Siru-Kappiam*. They are *Nilakesi, Sulamani, Yasothara-Kavyam, Nagakumara-Kavyam,* and *Uthayanan-Kathai.* They are all probably the works of Jain authors. They are in merit and historic interest nowhere near the Five Great Epics or rather the three which are known to us today.

xi. The Period of Religious Revival

The next period in Tamil Literature, *i.e.,* from the 6th to the 10th century is what may be called the period of Religious Revival when great Bhakta poets poured forth their soul-stirring song offerings. Brahminism had heavily lost ground to the Buddhist and Jain religions and this resulted in its turn in a vigorous Revivalist Movement often characterised by polemics, miracles, conversions and persecution, and bid for royal favour.

Its Literature.

The outstanding literature of this period are the *Tiruvasagam,* the *Tevaram,* and *Tiruvaymoli.* The Saiva saints and the Vaishnava saints belong to this period. Karaikal Ammaiyar seems to be the earliest of Saiva hymnists. The first three Alwars are the earliest of Vaishnava hymnists. Both these people developed a godly literature in their own way. Tamil language possesses more than sixteen thousand stanzas in praise of God. All these belong to the said five centuries.

The Saiva saints called the *Nalvar*—the Four—are Manikkavasagar, Tirujnana Sambandar, Appar (Tirunavukkarasu), and Sundarar.

Manickka-vasagar.

Manikkavasagar: The life of this saint who bears a favourable comparison with St. Augustine, St. Paul, and St. Francis of Assisi and other learned saints of the West, is to be traced from poetical legends which have grown around that notable figure. It is even difficult to definitely assign to him a particular period, but still it is reasonable to fix it as the third[1] century A.D. His chief works are the *Tiruvasagam* and the *Tirukkovai.*

[1] A dispute, which will probably never be settled, goes on about his date. Many argue that he belonged to the ninth century and followed Sambandar, Appar and Sundarar. What matters most, however, is his teaching and not his date.

P. pp. 128 and 129. *D.* p. 99.

Tiruvasagam : Of these the *Tiruvasagam* relates an autobiographical tale of the different stages of his spiritual life and experience which ultimately enabled him to attain enjoyment, ineffable and eternal. It is a torrential outflow of ardent religious feelings and emotions in rapturous songs and melodies. This work may be regarded as a convenient handbook on mystical theology. It is the spontaneous outpouring of his ecstatic feelings, under the stress of strenuous spiritual impulses. Among the accredited devotional works in the Tamil tongue it takes the foremost rank.

Dr. G. U. Pope has rendered an invaluable service to Tamil in translating this work into English. It is difficult to find a parallel for this work in the other languages of the world but it would not be altogether inappropriate to state that the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas A. Kempis parallels most closely this treasure of the Tamilar. One is struck again and again by the similarity of thought and even expression—why, even whole sentences—between the two books.

Tirukkovai : The other equally remarkable work of his is the *Tirukkovai.* Superficial readers devoid of true spiritual acumen are apt to treat this supreme mystic work as an ordinary text-book of love-poetry. True, what is known in Sanskrit as the *Srngararasa* seems at first sight to dominate the whole poem. But it must be remembered that it is only a thin veil covering grand and beautiful religious truths and conceptions.

It would not be out of place here to give the sum and substance of the story contained in this poem as a layman finds it. A lover accidentally meets a maid in some solitary mountain glade, is enamoured of her, approaches her and both become fast attached to each other by the silken bonds of love. Then they marry in public and settle down to the life of householders. Shortly after, one business or other necessitates the husband's absence in foreign countries for a shorter or longer period according to the nature of the business. Both feel the separation keenly, and look forward rather eagerly to the day when both of them should meet for an indissoluble union as it were. But the grief of the forlorn wife in her solitary home ever thinking of her absent lord, daily becomes more and more unbearable, and she breaks forth in piteous wail, expressive of the various phases of her grief. It is this grief of the lonely wife yearning to join her husband in warm, indissoluble embrace that allegorizes the earnest efforts of the individual soul seeking re-union with the Universal Soul.

Men of deep intuitive insight perceive and perceive rightly, the highly spiritual meaning underlying this story. The Lord was the eternal object of his love, and Manikkavasagar himself, a lover

D. pp. 101 and 102.

from the earliest days of his life. But by some accident, he has been long separated from the object of his love. He feels this separation intensely, realizes this well, and yearns for an indissoluble, inviolable, and irreproachable union or oneness with God.[1]

The *Tiruvasagam* and the *Tirukkovai* are practically free from any religious bias or bigotry.

The other three Saiva Saints.

The other three saints were vigorous protagonists of the Saiva faith and were the spear-heads of the revivalist movement of the Saiva religion. They were deeply moved by the decline of their religion and the growing supremacy of Buddhism and Jainism and they dedicated their lives to fighting the apathy and ignorance of their people. They travelled from place to place throughout the length and breadth of the Tamil country, and everywhere they adopted a simple procedure of exhortation to the people to rise and be saved. They took a local temple and the local deity and wove their songs of mysticism and praise to the Lord round this nucleus. The songs were usually ten with a eleventh added in many cases as a 'signature' song. The tenth is marked, in many cases, by direct attacks of other rival religions and sects. But today with the polemics a thing of the past, the thousands of songs in the *Tevaram* and the hundreds in the *Tiruvasagam* delight and uplift one and all in the Tamil-land.

It is stated that what we have of the *Tevaram* is but a fragment of what existed long ago. These too would have been lost to us but for the labours of Nambi Andar Nambi, of Thiru-Narayur. This Tamil Vyasa who collected the Saiva hymns and grouped them into eleven *tiru-murais* lived in Cola-nadu. The last ten *pathikams* (section) of the last collection were his own. His *Tiru-Thondar-Tiru-Antadi* formed the basis of *Peria-Puranam* by Sekkilar, a remarkable and composite hagiology or lives of sixty-three saints in seventy-two cantos, totalling 4,286 stanzas.

What the four Saiva saints did to the Saiva religion the Twelve Alwars did for the Vaishnava faith.

[1] A similar significance underlying the Third Book of the *Kural* appears to have been lost sight of the course of ages. The inappropriateness of the present day lay-sense attached to the chapters on 'Bliss' will be seen from the fact that the fourth and final aspect of life is *Vidu*—At-one-ment, or *Moksha*—and the crudity of imagining that worldly love has been treated as the stage just before it, cannot be over-emphasised.

D. p. 103.

The Twelve Alwars have been classified in different ways by different classifiers. The orthodox Vaishnavas hold that the Alwars were the incarnations of the sacred weapons and vehicles of Vishnu. The lives of the Vaishnava saints are found in *Guruparamparai* or the genealogy of the *Gurus* and in *Alwar Vaipavam* or the chronicles of Alwars relating the events and occurrences connected with these saints. Very little is known of the biographies of Poikayar, Peyar and Poothatthar. The names of the Alwars, the number of hymns sung by each, and their birth place are given below :

The Alwars.

Nadu	Name.	No. of Stanzas.	Birth-place.
Pallava-nadu	1. Poikayar	100	Conjeevaram
	2. Puthatthar	100	Mahabalipuram
	3. Peyar	100	Mailapur
	4. Tirumalisaiyar	216	Tirumalisai
Cola-nadu	5. Tiruppan Alwar	10	Urayur
	6. Thondaradippodi	55	Tirumandankudi
	7. Tirumangaiyar	1,351	Tirukkurayalur
Cera-nadu	8. Kulasekhara	105	Kollam (Quilon)
Pandiya-nadu	9. Periyalvar	473	Srivilliputtur
	10. Andal	173	do.
	11. Nammalwar	1,296	Alwar Tirunagari
	12. Madhura Kavi	11	Tirukolur

From this list it will be seen that the largest number of hymns contributed to the *Prabandham* have been by Tirumangai Alwar and Nammalwar and, next to them, by Periyalwar and Tirumalisai Alwar.

Of the 4,000 making up the Vaishnava Scriptures, the *first* thousand (really 947) is known as *Tiru-moli*, which comprises the hymns of Perialwar, Andal, Kulasekhara, Tirumalisai, Thondaradippodi, Tiruppan, and Madurakavi ; the *second* thousand (really 1,351) known as *Peria-tirumoli* was the work of Tirumangai ; the *third* thousand (correctly 817) called *Iyal-pa* was the contribution of the first three Alwars, Tirumalisai, Nammalwar, and Tirumangai ; and the *fourth* thousand (strictly 1,102), called *Tiruvaymoli*, was entirely the work of Nammalwar.

The first Alwars witnessed no jarring alien faiths in their time ; Tirumalisai, Tirumangai and Thondar-adi-podi had enough of them and opposed Saivaism, Jainism and Buddhism alike.

P. pp. 182 and 183.

Tirumalisai, Nammalwar, and Tirumangai were the greatest of the Alwars of Vaishnava saints ; and Nammalwar lived at a time when the land was almost free from alien religious influences and when the Vaishnavas and Saivas were at peace.

Their contributions of hymns and prayers in praise of Vishnu make up the *Nalayirap-prabandham* also called the *Divya-Prabandam* a sacred work esteemed by the Vaishnavas as the second Veda. It stands on the same footing of sanctity as the *Tevaram* of the Saiva saints. Every one of the Alwars had personal, intuitive experience of the Divine Presence.

When these hymns are sung or chanted, it may be said without fear of contradiction that nothing sweeter to the ear can be found in the entire range of Tamil literature and very few, if any, can equal their quality of lifting the soul into realms of spiritual ecstasy.

The hymns sung by the Alwars were collected and arranged in order and published together by St. Nathamuni into one volume and titled the *Nalayira-Prabandam* or the 'Book of Four Thousand Hymns'. Nathamuni was a contemporary of Nambi-andar-nambi, —the compiler of the Tiru-murais—and he was inspired by the latter to do a like service to the Vaishnava hymns.

xii. Period of Literary Revival.

The next period in the history of Tamil literature was one of literary fervour. The great trio of this period were Kamban, Otta-kuttan and Puhalendi. We do not give any detailed account of Kamban and his works as there is a separate note on him in this book on a later page and this work of V. V. S. Aiyar is itself an elaborate testimony to Kamban's greatness.

Otta-kuttan was a contemporary of Kamban and his *Uttara-kandam* winds up the *Ramayanam* of Kamban. He wrote the *Eetti-elupathu* and the *Thakka-yaga-parani* and the three *Ulas* on Rajaraja, Vikrama, and Kulottunga Colas. He was a rival to our great poet. If Kamban was strong in his stately *viruttams* and resembled Milton in his diction and rhythm, Otta-kuttan was a severe critic of poetry and an expert in making *antadi, kovai* and *ula* (various types of metrical compositions).

Puhalendi was a contemporary of Otta-kuttan, and there existed between them bitter rivalry throughout their lives. Puhalendi was famous for his *venba* and his best work is the *Nalavenba*—the story of Nala and Damayanti.

Before we close this period we must make mention of one species of poetic composition of which the most famous author is Jayamkondan.

He lived in the time of Kulotthunga Cola I, *i.e.*, between A.D. 1070 to A.D. 1118 and described that emperor's conquest of Kalinga-nadu in *Kalingatthup-parani*. '*Parani*' is a type of poetic composition which has for its hero a warrior who has killed in the field of battle a thousand male elephants and describes his exploits with the help of the demoniac machinery.

xiii. Tamil Prose and the Commentators.[1]

(*The Period of Criticism*, A.D. 1200-1450)

Our duty ends here. We have taken the reader, though hurriedly, through the realms of Tamil Literature. Kamban is a product of this great heritage, and has proudly maintained and handed over to his posterity this great empire, vastly enriched by his incomparable contribution to its wealth and fame.

But, any essay of this sort which fails to mention Tamil Prose and the great commentators would have omitted one of the most important sections of Tamil literature and a group of scholars who have done the greatest service to posterity by illuminating the dark caverns of ancient literature where lie the priceless treasures of Tamil. They have not merely illuminated the grottos but have excavated it, cleaned the treasures, and have arranged them in an imperishable museum along with a wealth of information which for learning and research can scarcely be rivalled.

The reader would have heard often and from many sources that there was no Tamil Prose at all in the olden days. Such criticism comes from a lack of research and of appreciation of what constitutes prose.

Now the question arises 'what is prose?' The ordinary definition of Prose is 'the common language of men unconfined to poetical measures'. In this sense, of course, almost all our old prose writings are no prose; for example, let us examine the prose passages in the ancient epic *Silappadikaram*; the rules of scansion can very well be applied and they can be brought under the general heading of the Tamil metre called *Asiriappa*.

[1] This section is chiefly composed of a series of extracts from *History of the Tamil Prose Literature*, an excellent thesis by V. S. Chengalvaraya Pillai, M.A.

The definition which Coleridge gives of Prose may serve our purpose here. Coleridge has said, "I wish our clever young poets would remember my homely definitions of Prose and Poetry, that prose is 'words in their best order', poetry 'the best words in their best order'. As the medium in which the Poet works is language, execution in his case is the arrangement of the best words in the best order, the best order being in all but a few anomalous cases, a rhythmical one. The technical laws of verse, however, deal only with 'the best order'. There remain as a part of execution 'the best words'. This section of the definition covers all the intellectual propriety, the moral passion, the verbal felicity, the myriad charms and graces of which 'the best order' is but the vehicle." Now applying this definition to our ancient prose, we may safely assert that it comes under the compass of Prose; for, there we find 'words in their best order' but not 'best words in their best order'. Hence, prose passages where we discern only poetic flow are all to be included in the province of prose.

It is noticeable that even the prose writings in the commentaries have always a tinge of poetic flow in them; and, in fact, the Tamil writers ancient as well as modern have had a great taste for this peculiar style and most of the commentators including the commentator on *Irayanar Agapporul*, Nacchinarkkiniyar, Parimelalagar, and Adiyarkkunallar very often indulged in making use of this peculiar style. This style, which is peculiar to Tamil, does not in any way mar the excellence of good prose; on the other hand, our pleasure is enhanced when we read passages which have the balanced poetic flow.

The Tamil word for Prose is *Urai-Nadai* which means 'the speech on foot'; and it will be interesting to observe that the Latin expression *Oratio pedestiris* for Prose means also 'speech on foot', i.e. 'the language that walks and does not profess to fly'; and as this was the style that could possibly be used in writing commentaries, they were also given the name of *'Urai'*; and Tamil Prose has had its origin mainly, if not solely, in commentaries. We have no grounds for asserting that there were separate prose works before the beginning of the 17th century. That commentary was not the only province of prose in our ancient literature, we may boldly assert; for, prose was used in a particular species of composition, the characteristic feature of which is called *'Tonmai'*—narration of ancient story—and it almost corresponds to the Epic Poetry. The *Tonmai* composition, like the

epic, "is one of the earliest poetical forms in which the primitive imagination has found expression. The 238th sutram of *Seyyul Iyal* in *Tolkappiyam,* defines its characteristics.

Prose in the Sangam Period.

Silappadikaram has some fine examples of prose though it is comparatively very small. The truth of the statement that "the best of prose is often poet's prose because the poets' mind is stored with good choice of figures and has also a disciplined habit in the use of them" may be noticed in Ilangovadigal's prose. The felicity of expression is markedly outstanding; and the passages have a thorough poetic flow, with alliterations and rhyme.

The *Uraiperu Katturai* (speech in prose) is the only prose portion of the work. The passages which are called *Uraippattu,* and *Uraippattu nadai,* have the least claims to be included in the province of prose.

Post-Sangam Prose A.D. 150 to A.D. 500.

During this period, the Jain ascendancy was pronounced; and its influence on the Tamil Literature was equally great. Most of the Jain Epics were written at this time.

The works of this period are the Jain prose works of the 'mongrel sort of diction', known as Manipravalam style, which is pleasing neither to the purely Tamil nor the purely Sanskrit ear; of these prose works, *Sri Puranam* and *Gadya Chintamani* deserve mention.

Medieval Period 500 A.D. to 1200 A.D.

As there is not even a single prose-writer who belonged to this period, we shall have to notice only commentators and their commentaries.

The Commentators and their prose A.D. 1200 to A.D. 1450.

Their period has been called the Reformatory Period. We may as well call it the period of commentators. It is a remarkable fact in the history of the Tamil Literature that commentaries have been, from a very long time, occupying a prominent place. Following the Tamil Grammar Tolkappiyam, we include commentaries also in the province of prose.

Commentaries in Tamil have been divided from of old into *Kandigai* and *Virutti,* compendious and elaborate. The former explains the text and the latter, in addition to explanation,

P. p. 255.

criticises, and supplements it, and weighs the value of other commentaries with it.

Ilampuranar was admittedly the first in point of time to annotate *Tholkappiyam* and is spoken of as 'the annotator'.

Perasiriyar was the author of a commentary on *Tiru-Chitt-Ambalak-kovai,* or, shortly, *Tirukkovaiyar,* by Manikkavasagar. From Nacchinarkiniar's commentaries we are led to infer that he wrote a commentary on *Tholkappiyam* and *Kurunthokai.* He is quoted by Nacchinarkiniyar in his commentary on *Tholkappiyam* (Aham 36).

His style is grammatical, graphic and simple. This is the best specimen of elegant and simple prose.

Sena-Varaiyar wrote a commentary on Words (*Sol*) in *Tholkappiyam,* which was called *Sena-Variyam* after the author.

His prose style is not so simple as that of Nacchinarkiniyar.

Nacchinarkiniyar was the greatest and most popular of commentators. His commentaries are always *Viruttis* or elaborate ones. In his commentaries good prose writing is found. He was the first to comment on the whole of *Tolkappiyam,* and the commentary bears his name—*Nacchinarkiniam.* Besides *Tolkappiyam, Pattupattu, Kalitthokai, Jivaka Chinthamani,* and twenty stanzas of *Kurunthokai* were annotated and commented on by Nacchinarkiniar, who always brought to bear on the great works he had chosen to annotate his clear and impartial mind, his vast erudition and his minute and critical observation. To quote the Rev. Dr. Bower : "His (Nacchinarkiniar's) comments are very much on the plan of European annotations. He paraphrases the text, and points out grammatical peculiarities ; he quotes Tolkappiya sutrams throughout, explains obsolete terms, and gives the various readings which existed in his day. . . . . . "

His style is simple and fine ; the occasional poetic flow, the balance of style, and the unembarrassed flow of diction are the outstanding features of his writings and it may well be said that good prose writing commences with Nacchinarkiniyar.

Adiyarkunallar is known to us as the commentator of *Silappadikaram.* He lived about the latter half of the 12th century, after Jayamkondan, from whose *Parani* he has often quoted in this commentary. He was a great authority on the

P., p. 256.

ancient Tamil classics. The work which he undertook to annotate was a very difficult one ; for, *Silappadikaram* is not a mere *Iyal* Tamil composition ; one who undertakes to annotate it should have a clear knowledge of the three branches of Tamil literature, *Iyal, Isai* and *Natakam.*

His prose sentences are often long, and they, now and then, have the poetic flow. His style is always clear.

Pari-mel-Alakar was a famous commentator of '*Tirukkural*,' and as he was a great Sanskrit scholar as well, his commentary is very valuable for its wealth of illustration and parallel quotations. His style is lucid and very suggestive.

His prose, unlike that of Nacchinarkiniyar, is very terse and in some places too brief to be easily intelligible. There is one thing very remarkable about his style in this commentary. Like the style of the great Poet whose work he had taken to annotate, his style also is so much compressed in form that one word in a sentence cannot be removed or substituted without at the same time damaging the compactness of the style. Not a single word he uses unnecessarily. The quotations he gives are very apt ; in his whole commentary on the *Kural* he gives quotations from about twenty select works. His style gets often poetical in its flow, as it cannot but become so, when its master seeks after compression of expression.

xiv. Modern Period (after A.D. 1450)

It is not our design nor will the space at our disposal permit us to deal with the Tamil literature of the Modern Period, i.e. from the 13th century onwards. If we did, we shall have to speak of them who are called The Lesser Trio—Kalamegam, famous for invectives in poetry ; the Twins, a lame man on the shoulders of his blind companion who laughed at the world in their inspired poems, two lines of which one of them will sing and the other will cap it with another two ; and Padikkasu Pulavar.

Luminaries of the Modern Period.

Mention shall have to be made also of the spiritual successors of the lineage of the Four Saiva Saints, *viz.*, Arunagiriyar, Pattinattar, Kumaraguruparar, Thayumanavar, and Ramalinga Swamigal.

There were many outstanding Muslim scholars and poets in this time whose works have enriched the Tamil literature.

Gopalakrishna Bharati has a separate niche in the hearts of the Tamilar.

The last and greatest literary product of the modern times will require a volume for himself, and in fact volumes have been written about him—our patriot and poet Subbramanya Bharati, who was responsible for the present day cultural and emotional resurgence in the south.

European Scholars.

No one can speak of the Modern Period and not speak of the selfless group of European scholars who had done so much for Tamil, *viz.*, research and classification of the ancient literature and grammar. Dr. Beschi, Rev. Caldwell, Dr. G. U. Pope, Rev. Lazarus, Rev. Drew, Rev. Ellis and others have laid the Tamilar under a debt of eternal gratitude. To this noble band belongs the Rev. H. A. Popley who lives amongst us today and is well-known for his musical compositions on the Christian faith on the lines of *Kirtans.* But we dare not venture into this tempting field.

The *Thembavani* is an Epic of the Life of Christ which we owe to this school of foreign scholars.

Decline of Tamil.

Tamil fell into evil days in the modern period. The patrons of Tamil literature, the line of Kings of Pandya, Cola and Cera Kingdoms had vanished. The land has fallen under alien rule. The debasement of the people and their culture was complete. They came even to be ashamed of their language and went so far as to call the ancient literature as unintelligible nonsense, and dismissed the chaste style of these treasures with a sneer. They went further and destroyed either wantonly or through superstitious beliefs or through ignorance the records on *cadjan* leaves.

The Matams.

In such straits, the Tamil Mutts or *matams* saved the priceless treasures for us. It is difficult to find an exact parallel to these institutions in other countries. They may be classed as monasteries with a head to each who is in charge by authority of spiritual succession.

The monasteries were the repositories of learning. Founded five or six centuries ago, for the diffusion of Tamil learning and the Saiva faith, they made a vigorous attempt to preserve old *cadjan* volumes against the ravages of time and the wild and ruthless persecutions of the Muhammadan invaders.

The most important of these *matams* are the Thiruvavaduthurai, Dharmapuram and in later days Thirupanandal. All of them have rendered and continue to render noble service to Tamil and Saiva religion. They maintain oriental colleges, support scholars and authors, and publish all the important literary and religious literature. It may be said that but for them many of our ancient works could never have come down to us. Latterly, these matams have taken to a new approach to the propagation of Tamil literature and Saiva doctrines. They now publish most of the ancient writings with English and Hindi translations. The amount of ignorance prevailing in India outside the Tamil-land about the heritage and culture of the Tamilar has to be seen to be properly assessed. The Saiva matams have earned the gratitude of all Tamilar and other well-wishers of Tamil and its literature.

It is from these repositories, and from private homes that Dr. U. V. Swaminatha Aiyar was able to trace out the ancient classics and numerous other notable works of Tamil literature. The people of India are wont to call great souls as the *avatar* of God Himself. It is as if the *Tamil-anangu*—The Tamil Muse—herself incarnated as this Tamil scholar, research student, tireless collector, compiler, and editor and publisher. Born of a poor family, educated almost by charity, meagrely paid for most of his life, with nothing but the generosity of friends (large in the wish to help but poor in ability to do so), this untiring savant brought out eighty-works, large and small, in his eighty-four years of life.

xv. Our Days

We have shown enough elsewhere to disprove the casual criticism that there was no prose in the olden days of Tamil. The attitude of mind behind this criticism and the ignorance it reveals is responsible for the state of Modern Tamil Prose, regarding which we cannot do better than quote[1] from a short article called "Tamil Prose Today" by Mr. N. Raghunatha Iyer, Assistant Editor, *The Hindu*, Madras, which appears in the Bharati Jayanti Souvenir (December, 1949) of the Bharati Tamil Sangam, Calcutta.

Present-day Prose.

[1] By kind permission of the author and the *Bharati Tamil Sangam*, Calcutta.

He writes :—"I have lately had to read large quantities of recent Tamil prose in certain allied *genres*. . . . . .

" . . . . In quality this new literature leaves much to be desired. Imperfect assimilation of Western ideas and insufficient command over the medium of expression [1] combine to produce on the reader's mind the effect of a rather unsatisfactory translation, not the impact of an authentic piece of literature. . . . .

" . . . There is a certain thinness of substance noticeable particularly in the academic type of criticism. A little learning is sought to be spread over a vast area . . . .

" When one turns to what may be called the literature of knowledge, two things are seen to stand out prominently, an immense zest and an almost equally immense inexperience. . . . . .

" The chief handicap is the absence of an agreed vocabulary of technical terms and the lack of a real mastery of the chosen subject on the part of all but a few of those who appear in the role of popularisers. . . . . .

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[1] There is a class of writers today which does not consider a knowledge of either the ancient Tamil literature or the rules of grammar as essential to their calling. It jeers at grammar and thinks that it has delivered the *coup-de-grace* to it by saying that the name *Nan-nool* (*The Good Rules*) has been given to the Tamil grammar as an euphemism and that it should have been called the *Vile Rules*. This class of writers may well benefit by the extracts we quote below from *English—A Course for Human Beings* by Eric Partridge. He says:

" . . . . . Grammar results from mankind's attempt to speak and write coherently and, by speaking or writing clearly, to make language easier to understand ; in a few words, it enables us to communicate with others, others with us. Grammar forms a notable aid to speaking, writing, listening ; in short, to communication. More : without grammar, we should have difficulty in understanding anything except the simplest messages or warnings.

" Only a fool is content to remain ignorant of the tools or instruments he is using ; only a fool thinks it unnecessary to understand the words he is using. This being so, you will find it useful—you will, indeed, find it necessary—to bear constantly in mind the relationship between speaker and hearer, hence the only slightly less important relationship between writer and reader.

" We can never hope to understand what language is and how it progresses (or doesn't) unless we remember that language is primarily the inter-activity of speech and hearing, and that writing is, in a sense, speech at second hand. Grammar is that wonderful and invaluable set of means and devices whereby we can render our words significant and make our ideas pass easily, from within ourselves, to other persons. Language is the vehicle, the carrier, of our thoughts and feelings and of our stories, whether true or imagined ; grammar is the machinery by which that vehicle is set and kept in motion ; the motive power (the steam, the electricity, the turbine) is the mind ; and the speech-sounds, or the printed page, are the air and space through which the vehicle moves."

—PUBLISHERS.

"... A standard literary language is yet to be evolved. Those writers who were brought up in the Pandit tradition but wish to stand well with the new public too often merely achieve drabness in trying to shed their pedantry. . . . .

"There is a rude vigour in the writings of polemists; but too many of them take a childish delight in such verbal tricks as alliteration, assonance and puns. While there is definitely a place in literature for the genuine regional dialect, too often does the slovenliness that comes of pure ignorance do duty for realism. Journalese and portmanteau language have a strange fascination for the half-educated. And the extent to which the average Tamil writer who has a rudimentary knowledge of English has had his syntax corrupted is amazing."

Exceptions, there are to this sorry state, as to anything else in this world, but one speaks here of the general state of prose today as a whole and not of those rare authors who are responsible for the very little excellent prose of these days.

To name but a few, Mr. P. Sundaram Pillai, Mr. Vedanayagam Pillai, Mr. A. Madhaviah, Mr. V. Kalyanasundaram Mudaliar, Rao Bahadur P. Sambanda Mudaliar, Mr. R. P. Sethu Pillai, Mr. K. V. Jagannathan, Dr. Seshadrinathan, Mr. Swaminatha Sarma, Dr. Varatharajan, Mr. Gnanasambandam, Mr. C. N. Annathurai, Mr. Ganapati Aiyar, Mr. C. Rajagopalachari and a few others are the outstanding prose writers of the present day.

Dr. U. V. Swaminatha Aiyar, the great editor and scholar has left a wealth of excellent prose writings, and his unfinished Autobiography is one of the best of its type.

The mention of Dr. Swaminatha Aiyar will recall to mind his great teacher the late Minakshisundaram Pillai, and Aiyar's friend Thiagaraja Chettiar whose names occur again and again in Aiyar's Autobiography.

Namakkal Ramalingam Pillai, the poet-laureate of Madras is another autobiographer of merit.

At the present day, prose predominates over poetry of which very little is written. Such poetic works are breaking new ground and it is too early to judge their worth and excellence.

xvi. Conclusion

Our object in compiling this brief survey is to make known to the wider world of India and abroad, in as adequate a manner as the small compass of this work will allow, the glories of Tamil people and their literature.

We have used the word 'compiled' advisedly. Nothing, or very little of the contents of this essay can claim any originality.

Acknowledgements.

We have merely strung together on page after page extracts from various writers, chiefly from '*Tamil Studies*' by M. Srinivasa Aiyangar, M.A., '*Tamil Literature*' by M. S. Purnalingam Pillai, B.A., L.T., and '*Studies in Tamil Literature and History*' by V. R. Ramachandra Dikshitar, M.A. We tender our grateful thanks and sincere apologies to these writers, their successors and publishers for the liberty we have taken in so profusely using their works—nay, in compiling this essay almost entirely with *verbatim* extracts from these works.

We are also indebted to many friends who have guided us with suggestions and material, chief among whom is Mr. G. Thiagarajan of Tanjore who lent us his unpublished notes and essays, and several books out of his library for compiling this survey.

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Reprints of this essay are available at Re. 1/- each copy, postage extra.
A few copies only have been printed.

KAMBAN

Kamban, the author of the *Ramayana* in Tamil, which is the subject of critical study in this work by V. V. S. AIYAR lived in the IX Century A.D.[1] He was born in Tiruvazhundur in the Cola country. His father was Athavan, a priest by caste. Kamban appears to have been a poet in the court of the Cola and Cera Kings, but his steadfast patron was Sadayappan of Tiruvennai-nallur whose name is referred to in ten places in *Kamba Ramayanam.*

Kamban was a devotee of Nammalvar, one of the famous Vaishnavite saints and poets. *Kamba Ramayanam* was composed by him about the eight hundred and eighties and according to the procedure of those days was recited by him for approval to an audience of the literary elite—a sort of Academy of Letters[2]—assembled in Srirangam in the month of *Panguni* (March-April) of the year 807[3] of the Salivahana Sakabda (885 A.D.) on the full-moon day when the star *Uttaram* was in the ascendant.[4] Kamban was acclaimed by the assembly as the *Kavichakravarti*—the Emperor of the Realms of Poesy—a title which every succeeding generation has been but confirming ever since.

Many are the stories which have come down to us in poems and by word of mouth about Kamban's difficulties before he had his work approved, about his spirit of independence and poetic hauteur and about the jealousies and intrigues of his contemporary poets ; but fact and fiction have so intermingled in these anecdotes that it is impossible to separate them today. They, however, bear evidence to the high veneration in which Kamban was and is held to this day in Tamil-land.

We should not omit to mention that in his work of over ten thousand and five hundred stanzas of four lines each, there are many interpolations too difficult to identify, though a hundred of them are now known to have been inserted by one Velliambala Thambiran. These interpolations, however, have not detracted the generations of Tamilians from their undying love for this great work.

His other works are said to be

Sadagopar-antadi,
Aerezhupathu,
Silaiyezhupathu,
Saraswathi-antadi.

1 Some say the XII Century.
2 Mushairas and Kavi-sammelans of these days.
3 The original poems allow an interpretation to mean 1107 instead of 807.
4 The Anniversary Day of the wedding of Shri Rama and Sita.

V. V. S. AIYAR

VARAGANERI VENKATESA SUBRAMANYA AIYAR, was born his father's first son, on 2nd April 1881, in a village near Karur in the Trichinopoly District of the Madras Province. His father Venkatesa Aiyar had settled at Varaganeri, a suburb of Trichinopoly, and in his retired days was resisting mass conversion of the Harijans to Christianity and was arranging for their reconversion to the Hindu fold.

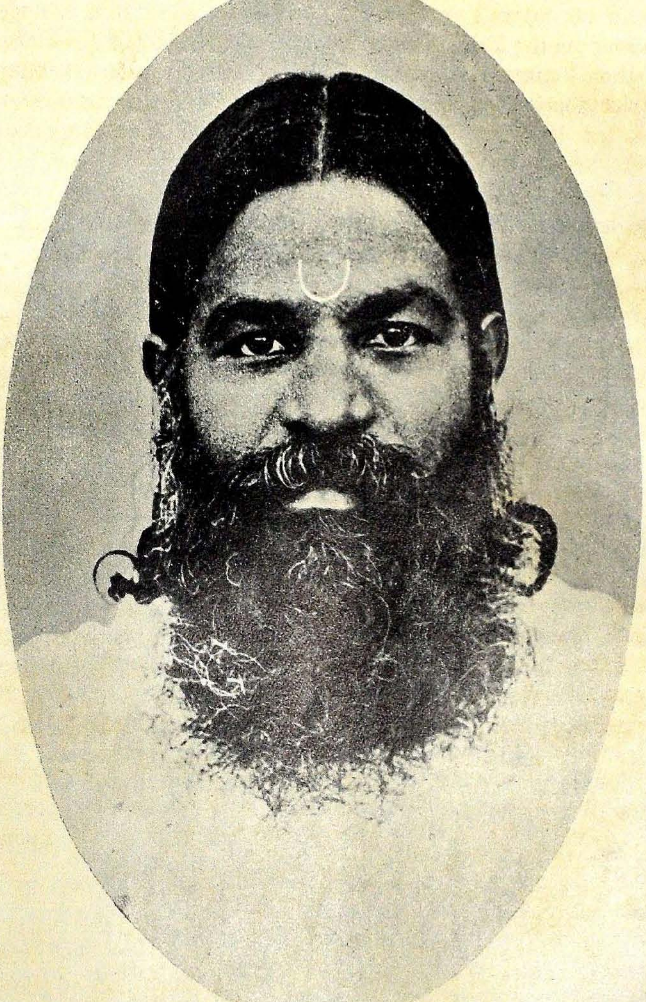
V. V. S. Aiyar, whom we shall hereafter mention as Aiyar for short, matriculated at the early age of twelve ranking fifth in the Presidency, and was married the same year; and graduated when but sixteen. His college-mates relate his annoying patience during discussions and controversies and his smiling away all opposition in the College Free Thinkers' Society, his drinking deep from Spencer and Spinoza, Milton and Moliere, and of his being the favourite of all his professors.

When twenty, he was to be seen practising as a lawyer at the Trichinopoly Bar; and five years later, he sailed to Rangoon to seek his fortune in Burma. But within a year he was bound for England to become a barrister.

London : Master of Latin, he came out first in *Roman Law* and "was an all round brilliant student". Nearly three years had rolled by and he was soon to return to India as an ambitious barrister to make fabulous fortunes, but Destiny was shaping him for quite a different life.

Wrote his associate :—

> "In 1907, the maid-servant at the famous India House in London handed a visiting card to us and presently a gentleman neatly dressed and inclined to be fashionable warmly shook hands with us, and told us that he came over to London to qualify himself as a full-fledged barrister. . . . He assured us of his intention to study English music and if possible also English dance as well. . . . . We entered our mild protest against thus dissipating the energy of one's youth in light-hearted pastimes. . . The gentleman, unconvinced, though impressed, took our leave, promising to continue to call on us every now and then. HE WAS SJT. V. V. S. AIYAR.
>
> "In 1910, we stood as a prisoner in London Brixon Jail. The warder announced visits and anxiously we accompany



V. V. S. AIYAR

the file of prisoners to the yard; we stand behind the bars, wondering who could have come to call on us and thus invite the unpleasant attention of the London Police. Presently a dignified figure enters the box in front of us. It was V. V. S. AIYAR. His beard was closely waving on his breast. He was unkempt. He was no longer the neatly dressed fashionable gentleman. His whole figure was transformed with some great act of dedication of life. . . . . "

Aiyar and Gandhiji: Diwali, the universal festival of rejoicing in the whole length and breadth of India, has a special significance to the South Indian. Aiyar and his companions in India House at London were anxious to celebrate the Diwali in Indian style as far as it was practicable in England, and Aiyar went seeking leading Indian after Indian in London to grace the occasion. But he met with no success. Aiyar heard that one Mr. Gandhi, a man of new ways, had come to London to represent the case of Indians in South Africa. After searching for him in the luxurious hotels and similar rendezvous of fashionable Indians of those days he found him in a humble home and invited him to preside over the celebrations. Gandhiji made searching enquiries about the mode of celebrations and when he was assured that it would be in purely Indian style he readily agreed. This was the first occasion on which Aiyar met Gandhiji. With his revolutionary zeal, Aiyar did not want to miss the opportunity of pressing his views on the rising leader. He spoke to him with vehemence about the revolutionary creed as the only possibility of winning independence for India. Gandhiji in turn preached him his newly-found satyagraha. Aiyar returned feeling naively confident that two or three more pep talks by him to Gandhiji would convince him and bring him to his way of thinking.

Aiyar was away when Gandhiji came to India House. The other companions of Aiyar, who were busy cooking, saw a thin, simply-dressed poor Indian and immediately pressed him into service and allotted him all the more menial jobs in the kitchen. Aiyar returned to the house to find the principal guest of the evening employed in the kitchen. He made profuse apologies to Gandhiji but he put him at his ease with his winning smile and heartily joined in the celebrations.

The Die is Cast: The moment came when he was to be called to the Bar. But he firmly refused to take the oath of

allegiance to the King, whom he would not recognise as the King of his country as well. Such was his irrevocable decision to completely dedicate his life for the cause of Indian freedom.

London to Amsterdam: This was sufficient proof of the volcano he was, and an urgent warrant was issued to arrest this fiery anarchist. During the night, the C.I.D. Police had occupied situations in the Hotel in which Aiyar resided, to take him away in the morning. Aiyar, scenting this, as a Jean Valjean, left the hotel at midnight, taking with him the barest necessities, and among them the volumes of *Kamba Ramayana* were to be found: such was his love for Kamban from whom he would not part even in such perilous times.

A broad intellectual forehead, a bold aquiline nose, a strong athletic form and a majestic beard adding colour to the arresting personality—yet the spy of the Scotland Yard was certain that this was the "South Indian Brahmin revolutionary" he was to arrest, his appearance like a Punjabi Sikh notwithstanding; and to fix the identity he handed over a telegram to V. V. S. Aiyar. With an uncanny presence of mind, Aiyar immediately returned the telegram unopened to the C.I.D. man stating that he was delivering it to the wrong addressee. The official was quick to point out the inscription 'V.V.S.' on Aiyar's handbag, and quicker was Aiyar to reply "Yes! My name is Veer Vikram Singh". The sleuth had to go away quietly.

Paris to Pondicherry: Crossing the Channel was not the end of the trouble. The British Secret Police in France were censoring all his letters, and the moment he entered any British territory he was to be taken into custody. Aiyar was constantly writing to his father of his desire to settle in Brazil where land was rich and plentiful, instead of going to India where he might be arrested and jailed. Could not his father, Aiyar asked, arrange for a hundred hardworking South Indian families to go with him to Brazil and colonise that country.

On a certain morning of November 1910, news reach the Government and the family of his presence at Pondicherry! And neither could believe it. The ruse was this: a bundle of letters in Aiyar's handwriting to his father and relatives was handed over by Aiyar to one of his friends in Paris to be posted every week, and this fixed the attention of the British authorities in France to Paris and to the ship routes to Rio de Janeiro.

In a few days a certain Muslim gentleman was swiftly passing through Italy and Greece, Turkey and Egypt. He was very devout,

constantly writing from the KURAN, and performing *Namaz* five times a day on the ship's deck. The ship touches Bombay, Colombo, and Tuticorin before he alights at Pondicherry harbour. Within a few hours, telegrams signed "V. V. S. Aiyar" are handed at the post office by this very same "muslim gentleman" informing the British Government of his presence in French India.

Aiyar was then just 29 years of age.

Pondicherry : Aiyar's life at Pondicherry for ten years from 1910 to 1920 is so fully packed with thrilling exploits, imperturbable courage in the face of worst dangers, and brilliant achievements in literature, that it is difficult to detail them all in this short sketchy note. And in all his revolutionary activities and literary work, we may mention, his wife was a source of constant help. Smuggling of revolvers, proscribed literature, arms and ammunitions to British India was a mere routine.

A versatile linguist knowing Latin, Greek, German, Persian, Urdu, Sanskrit, Hindustani, Telugu and Canarese, etc., Aiyar soon mastered French to study Napoleon's War Memoirs in the original; and wrote a synthetic treatise on military strategy, adapting Napoleon's method of warfare for a war against the British rulers. Lokamanya Tilak sent his nephew to Aiyar to copy down the manuscript and Aiyar had to send him back in the guise of a gypsy to save the manuscript and the messenger from the secret police.

Desiring to prepare a background of revolutionary mentality among his countrymen, Aiyar wrote Tamil biographies of Napoleon, Garibaldi, Mazzini, Rana Pratap Singh, Chandra Gupta, etc., and wrote some excellent short stories as well.

Finding it impossible to dislodge Aiyar from Pondicherry by fair or foul means, the British Government took advantage of the Great War of 1914-18 and made the French Government believe that Aiyar was secretly communicating with the EMDEN which was then scouring the Bay of Bengal. Although these false allegations could not be proved, still as an ally of the British, the French Government agreed to deport Aiyar to Algiers in Africa. In order to gain time, Aiyar started a round of negotiations and wanted to leave something behind him to keep his memory green among his countrymen. Translation of the Tamil Classic—KURAL—into English was decided on as his best legacy for the country. It was on 1st November, 1914 he put his pen to paper. Day after day he pounded away at the translation, every

evening thinking that he might be deported the next morning. On 1st March, 1915, the manuscripts were ready for the press. Though completed in such perilous circumstances and haste, Aiyar's translation is considered the best even today.

Second Meeting with Gandhiji: Gandhiji came in 1917 to Pondicherry and Aiyar met him for the second time. To this date, Aiyar had not forsworn his belief in revolutionary methods, but when Gandhiji met him it was a case of '*veni, vidi, vici.*' Gandhiji came, saw him, and conquered him. Aiyar became a convert to the principles of Ahimsa and he who never went about without a revolver in his possession, now exchanged it for the *Takli.* To his dying day he remained true to his new religion and there were often moments when his closest friends wished that he was not such a staunch devotee of Ahimsa.

Back to the Indian Scene: The general amnesty of 1920 saw Aiyar an editor of a Tamil daily newspaper at Madras. But he was soon to spend nine months in Bellary Central Jail during 1921-22 on a charge of sedition. It was in those nine months of prison life that Aiyar wrote his *Magnum Opus*—A STUDY OF KAMBA RAMAYANA—which we now offer to the lovers of literature today.[1]

Aiyar needed some books for consultation and we translate here the letter he wrote to a friend in Benares.

He said:

> "Dear brother, you would have come to know of my stay here through the newspapers. I have still six more months to stay here. I expect they would pass just as the last three months have passed—in literary work..... You could do me a service. I am writing a Study of Kamban. I require in this connection Griffith's English translations of Valmiki[2] and Tulsidas[3] *Ramayanams* and I also require........ As I

[1] Between the leaves of Aiyar's rough manuscripts was found a faded cutting from a newspaper quoting records in daily or weekly output of writing by famous authors. Dr. Johnson's *Rasselas* of a little more 20,000 words produced in a week, Mark Twain's 4,000 words a day, Stevenson, Du Maupassant, Balzac, Hutchinson of "If Winter Comes" fame, Oppenheim and Wells have inspired Aiyar. His manuscripts show dates and numbers of words written each day. In nine months of prison life with its unbending routine, Aiyar lags not far behind these masters with his work of a little over 140,000 words, more than a third of which are set in verse.

[2] The author of the original *Ramayana* in Sanskrit.

[3] The author of the Hindi rendering of the *Ramayana.*

This ms. 185 Kural pages. 227 words to the [illegible] in this note book. 16

Chapter VI

Lakshmana — his character and his battles with Indrajit

"[illegible]d, how wonderful is their combat! Who fought like this? Never was ~~that~~ seen such fight [illegible] [illegible]!"

There was no end of the flight of arrows. But the two heroes parried each other's arrows and found time to aim arrows against each other. Lakshmana's and Hanuman's bodies were flowing with blood. The Rakshasa's chariots were broken one after another and he got up a new chariot only to descend from their broken ruins the very next. Lakshmana's arrows killed his lions and his

cannot think of any one else who could get them for me, and as at present I have very little money, and as these books will be available in Benares only, I have to trouble you. As soon as I come out of prison I shall pay you the price." More follows with a list of the books and where they will be available. He continues : " I have finished nearly a hundred pages of the work. I am now at present writing the character study of Lakshmana. [1] I expect the book to run to about five hundred pages. Wherever I have quoted any poems from Kamban I am trying to translate them in verse as far as possible. I hope that this work will reveal the glories of Kamban to the scholars in North India and to those Tamilians who have forgotten their Tamil. My address is V. V. S. Aiyar, No. 65, Central Jail, Bellary."

The Last Phase : Released from jail, Aiyar again plunged into the vortex of his work. After a short swift tour of India, Aiyar started an Ashram at Shermadevi, Tinnevelly District in 1922-23, called the TAMIL GURUKULAM, where the pupils and the teachers ploughed the fields and reaped the harvest, laid bricks and built huts, weaved cloth, printed books and magazines, did carpentry and gardening, learnt self-defence, archery, sword fights, etc. Aiyar's ambition was to create a race of Tamilians similar to the Sikhs of the Punjab, and he wrote a biography of Guru Gobind Singh to instil the ideals in the minds of his countrymen.

The Heroic End : It was 10 a.m., 3rd June, 1925. The sun was shining with all its splendour. The Kalyan-Thirtha Falls was roaring at a distance with a majestic voice amidst a scene of great beauty and charm. Aiyar joined the party of pupils he had sent two days ago from the Ashram for a visual education trip. All went up the hill and Aiyar was helping the safe passage of the students across the proximal side of the falls. Aiyar's daughter, Subhadra, insisted on her crossing the river, just as the others, but as Fate would have it, she tripped into the deep fast current with the cry, " Father ! Father ! "—and within the fraction of a second Aiyar had jumped into the stream not a bit thinking about the consequences and he almost held his daughter by her locks, but only to find it slipping away, and in a few

[1] A fac-simile of a part of the first page of the manuscripts of this chapter is reproduced opposite. Note the seal of the Bellary Central Jail, and the calculations of words to a page, and the probable number of printed pages of the size of a page of his *Kural*.

moments both were submerged in the hungry waters of the *Tamrabaraparani.*

Thus ended in but 44 years one of the most momentous of lives.

" How we long to write of the goodness and gentleness of disposition, how when betrayed you stood unshaken, how you served them who owned thee not : how you suffered when unknown and made not the slightest mention of it when you got known..... Thy greatness must stand undimmed though unwitnessed by man like the lofty Himalayan peaks. Thy services and sacrifices must be buried in oblivion as do the foundations of a mighty castle........."

GANDHIJI ON AIYAR.

From *Young India*—18th June, 1925
(Editorial page)

V. V. S. Iyer :

The readers of YOUNG INDIA *will share my regret over the death by drowning of Sjt. V. V. S. Iyer. I had the pleasure of meeting him in London years ago. He was then a fierce anarchist. But he gradually mellowed down. The fire of patriotism burnt none the less brightly in him. He was a staunch non-cooperator and latterly he had intended to devote himself entirely to conducting the Shermadevi Gurukul. I always regarded him as a fine, sincere and persevering servant of the nation. May his soul rest in peace !*

—M. K. G.

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A STUDY OF THE RAMAYANA OF KAMBAN

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

It is not easy to convince the literary world at this late hour of day that there is, unsuspected by the greater part of it, a Tamil poet who is worthy to take rank with the greatest names in literature. It is, however, my purpose in this book to make an attempt to prove that in the RAMAYANA OF KAMBAN the world possesses an epic which can challenge comparison not merely with the *Iliad* and the *Æneid*, the *Paradise Lost* and the *Mahabharata*, but with its original itself, namely, the *Ramayana* of Valmiki. This is not the language of mere patriotic enthusiasm. It is an opinion that has grown slowly with years and after deep and careful study. And I hope to make the impartial reader rise from the study of this monograph with a conviction of the truth of my contention and with a desire to know more of the poet than what he will see exhibited within the pages of this volume.

I spoke of Valmiki's work as the original of Kamban's *Ramayana*. But Kamban has not translated Valmiki. He has merely taken the story immortalised by the Aryan sage and, though he has followed it closely enough in all its details, has written an entirely original poem. Bentley said of Pope's *Iliad*, "It is a pretty poem, but you must not call it Homer." Of Kamban's *Ramayana* we should say reversing the language, "It is not Valmiki's *Ramayana*, but it is a grander poem".

It is a curious fact that during the whole course of our long literary history, until very recent times, no Samskrit classic has been literally translated into any of our vernaculars[1]. The *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Bhagavata*, and the *Skanda Purana* have been among the literary treasures that poets from every part of India have attempted to render into their mother-tongues. But in no single vernacular is there a literal translation of any of these divine poems which dates from more than three or four decades ago. On the contrary, all the old

1 The *Bhagavad Gita* appears to be the only exception so far as we know. It has been literally translated into Tamil verse by the great Acharya Manavala Maha Muni in the 12th century of the *Sakabda*, i.e. the 13th century A.D.

poetical renderings of these classics in the vernaculars are no more than free adaptations from their originals.

This tendency to rewrite the stories of the Samskrit classics instead of translating them seems to be a common instinct with the peoples of India, for, so far as we can see, it cannot have been the result of imitation by one people of the literary methods of another. The earliest adaptation of a Samskrit classic into a vernacular tongue is most probably that of the *Mahabharata* into Tamil by Perun Devanar who is said to have lived in the first century of the *Sakabda*[1]. Since then, the *Skanda Purana*, the *Ramayana* and the stories of Nala and Harishchandra, among others, have been rendered into Tamil by scores of poets, but not one of these renderings is a mere translation. We find the same phenomenon in Telugu. The monumental *Bharatam* of Nannayya and Tikkanna has nothing in common with Vyasa's *Mahabharata* except the story. There is nothing to show that the authors of the Telugu *Bharatam* took to this method of adapting the Samskrit epic instead of translating it from the example of Tamil poets. The same is the case with Bhaskara's *Ramayana*, Tulsi Das's *Rama Charita Manas* and other vernacular classics of India. All these poets have dealt very freely with their originals. Their tropes and fancies, their imagery, their descriptions and dissertations are not those of the original poems but their own. They develop certain incidents, cut down certain others, and introduce interludes, fables, allegories or new incidents according to their pleasure. In short what they write are new poems altogether and not translations. And this tendency is to be seen among writers of Provinces situated so wide apart as Bengal and the Tamil country and Gujarat, and of ages extending from the first century up to our own times.

If we look into the matter carefully, this method of popularising the stories revered by the people will appear much better than the western method of literally translating them into poetry. For, the attitude of mind in which the poet has to place himself in the attempt to translate from one language into another acts as a drag upon all his higher faculties, so that even poets of a very high order are failures when they descend to translation on a large scale. Coleridge hit the nail on the head when he said "the translation of poetry into poetry is difficult, because the translator must give a brilliancy to his language without that warmth of original conception from which such brilliancy would follow of its own accord". The mind of the

[1] i.e. the 2nd Century of Christ.

poet is checked in its flight when it is weighted with the thoughts and images of the original which he has to render closely into another language. His mind loses its natural flow and has to substitute for it a *simulacrum* by all sorts of subterfuges. And the result is a travesty of the original which is not merely below the original, but even below the average quality of the works of the translator himself, as one can see by comparing, for instance, Pope's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* with his other works.

Hence it is that Indian poets even of the second rank have with unerring good sense abstained from translating the Samskrit classics, but instead have rewritten them in their own way for their countrymen. Thus while Europe has—to take one representative each from the Greek and the Latin literatures—but one *Iliad* and one *Æneid*, and a host of translations of these epics, India has not one *Ramayana* and one *Mahabharata*, but at least a score of *Ramayanas* and *Mahabharatas*. No doubt these are of unequal merit, but each one of them is at least as great as the unhampered flight of its author's genius could make it.

We should think that this difference between Europe and India in the method adopted for the rendering of the classics into the vernaculars is due to the fact that, while the nations of Europe have cut themselves away from their ancient religions as those of Greece and Rome, the peoples of India are, on the other hand, even to this day followers of the religion of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, and the *Skanda Purana* and the *Bhagavata*. To the modern European, Jupiter and Minerva and Mars and Vulcan are nothing more than names, though with poetical associations. Chateaubriand goes so far as to call them devils who took form to corrupt mankind. But to the Hindu of today, Rama and Krishna, Uma and Saraswati are heroes and divinities worshipped with the same fervour with which they were worshipped by his ancestors before him. While it is only the scholar in Europe that can feel for Andromache and Hector, and Hercules and Cassandra, every Hindu, be he or she the most innocent of letters will shed tears with Sita and Draupadi, and swell with pride at the exploits of Bhima and Hanuman. Therefore, in taking up these stories as the subject matter of their epics our poets had no need to look to the literary classes alone for readers, but could appeal to all their countrymen who spoke their language ; and that ought to be the reason why they rewrote in their mother-tongues, instead of translating, these epics so much loved of their people. Perhaps the poets

of Europe too would have followed a similar course if there had been epics that treated of the stories of Abraham or Jesus, great and ancient enough to make the greatest poets think it a matter not derogatory to their dignity to rewrite them in their own language. The absence of such ancient poems of transcendental merit may in part explain the fact that in modern Europe the natural instinct of epic poets to embody in poetry the fundamental beliefs of their race and civilisation has produced not one or more central stories for the whole of Europe, but such different poems as the *Divine Comedy*, *Jerusalem Delivered*, the *Paradise Lost* and *Les Martyrs*[1].

However this may be, here is the fact that Kamban has merely sung again in Tamil the great story of the *Ramayana* and yet has been adjudged by his contemporaries, no mean judges of poetry, as the Emperor of the Realms of Poesy—a title which every succeeding generation in the Tamil country has been but confirming ever since.

Other poets have taken their stories from earlier authors or contemporary tradition, and have won immortal fame by singing them. Indeed it may almost be said that no great poet has ever cared to *invent* a story. For, even Valmiki got his story from Narada and Brahma, Vyasa sang of the events that took place before his own eyes, and Homer wrote the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* out of the traditions current in his time. Corneille and Rachine looked to Greece and Rome and Spain for the themes of their tragedies. It is well-known that Shakespeare borrowed his stories from any source that was near at hand and not infrequently rewrote for his own stage dramas which were popular in his day. But the sources from which these masters drew their stories were almost always of very indifferent merit, and none but the curious student of literary criticism would now care to look into them. Kamban's case, however, is entirely different. He has not merely taken his theme from the greatest of Samskrit epics but has followed it in almost every detail step by step. He has himself challenged comparison, though in all humility, with the first of Samskrit poets, and yet not one of the critics who have compared his work with that of Valmiki has ever denied him place among the greatest poets of the world. It is now for the larger critical audience of India and of the rest of the world to appraise Kamban's work and adjudge to him his proper place among the sons of Saraswati[2].

1 Though this work is in prose, Chateaubriand has conceived the theme and conducted the story in epic style.

2 the goddess of learning.

CHAPTER II

THE STORY OF THE RAMAYANA [1]

Though Kamban has followed Valmiki very closely in the conduct of his epic, and though no Indian is ignorant of the story, I propose to give here in a short compass the main incidents of that immortal story, always following Kamban, so that even those who have not hitherto made themselves acquainted with the same may be enabled to follow this study with ease.

Ages and ages ago the island of Lanka which is to the south of India, and which was in those days hundreds of times larger than it is at present, was inhabited by a race of beings called Rakshasas, who are described as huge and often misshapen giants, strong and powerful, and active and energetic to a degree much beyond the race of men. They crossed over to the mainland often and disturbed the peace of the holy men living there. Ravana, their king had, by his great austerities and devotion to Shiva and Brahma, received from them the blessings of enormous strength, long life, and victory against every possible opponent. Valiant, proud, and ambitious, he made war against heaven and earth. Wherever he went victory followed him, and the whole universe was powerless to stand against him and trembled with the fear of the Rakshasa name. He destroyed sacrifices, killed Rishis and other holy men, subdued the gods, and made war on mankind. The gods implored Vishnu, the Protector of the universe, to free them from the yoke of Ravana and the Rakshasas, and their prayer was heard. Ravana in the pride of his strength had deemed man and the monkey as too much beneath him to pray to Shiva and Brahma for victory against them. Vishnu therefore promised to the gods that he would Himself come down on earth and be born as man and that He would destroy Ravana and his Rakshasas for ever. He also commanded the gods to be born on earth as monkeys and apes and bears and await his *avatar*[2].

So Vishnu incarnated Himself as man and was born in the family of the Raghus as Rama, son and heir to Dasharatha, Emperor of India. Rama had three brothers, Bharata, Lakshmana

[1] This chapter is the substance of a lecture delivered before the Highgate Hill Unitarian Church, London in 1908 by the author and partly printed in the last issue of the "Swaraj" of Shriman Bepin Chandra Pal in the subsequent year.

[2] Incarnation.

and Shatrughna. The four brothers grew in age and years, in learning and all the princely arts. Even as the ocean smiled upon by the silvery orb of the moon swells in joyous strength, even so did these children grow in grace and beauty, strength and learning. Rama and Lakshmana excelled in archery and all the arts of war. Bharata and Shatrughna learned, as royal children must, the art of using the bow and the arrow, but were more mild in temperament. All three brothers vied with each other in their love for the valiant, the sweet-souled, the serene Rama.

The fame of Rama attracted a sage called Vishvamitra who prayed Dasharatha to send Rama with him to guard his sacrificial fire from pollution by the evil Rakshasas. Dasharatha had never hitherto parted with Rama. He had, like Abraham, despaired of having an heir born to him, when, lo, the joy of all the Raghus, Shri Rama, was born in his house. Rama was the light of his eyes, dearer than very life unto him. So the prayer of the sage struck him in the heart. 'Even as a man blind from birth, who had been blessed with vision for a brief space of time, would groan helplessly if he should suddenly lose his new acquired power of sight, even so grieved the king.' Dasharatha prayed the sage to leave Rama who was too young to fight, and offered himself to go with him to guard his sacrifice, but the very suggestion of a denial of his request excited the wrath of Vishvamitra and his serene aspect grew terrible to behold. Vasishtha[1] however advised Dasharatha to accede to the request of Vishvamitra and the king allowed Rama, and also Lakshmana, to accompany the holy man.

Rama and Lakshmana destroyed the Rakshasas that attempted to pollute and desecrate the sacrifice. On its completion the Rishi took the princes to Mithila. The king of Mithila, Janaka of Vedic fame, had a daughter called Sita whom he had vowed to give in marriage to any prince who was able to bend the bow of Shiva, the God of Destruction. Vishvamitra had in his heart decided that sweet-eyed Sita should wed his ward Shri Rama, and that was the reason why he took the brothers to Mithila. Destiny itself seemed intent on consummating the union.

> The spirit of Mithila seemed to say, 'I prayed both day
> and night,
> And sweetest Lakshmi, lotus born, of fairest form and
> bright,

[1] The family preceptor.

In answer to my prayers left her thousand petalled flower,
She left her home and sought to dwell in my own greenest bower.
Come thou, my gracious lord, to see and wed that purest one'.
The pennants seemed her outstretched arms welcoming Dasharath's son[1].

The artful Rishi took Rama and Lakshmana through the very street where Sita's bower was situated. As luck would have it, Sita was standing on the top floor of her palace surrounded by her girl friends. To his great delight Vishvamitra saw Rama looking in that direction, noted that he encountered her eyes, and that afterwards he looked at nothing else. For who could look on that face, sweet with the sweetness of Indian spring, carrying memories of blue heavens and sunny glades, of the scent of a thousand delicate flowers, of the warbling brook and the voice of the *koil*—who could look on that face and not have his heart enthralled ? The poet becomes speechless before the ineffable perfection of her loveliness and falls down before it. He dares not describe her form. He says, 'what shall we compare that form to, by the standard of whose loveliness alone can all other beauty be measured ? The eyes of men as well as those of the gods are too weak to drink in the full effulgence of that heavenly form. As the Ocean of Milk, when it had yielded ambrosia, could afterwards give nothing that is sweeter, even so, when the Creator had made Sita, he could create no higher beauty, for He had realised perfection. What shall we say is the cause that Lakshmi left her lotus home and was born on earth ? Is it the prayer of Brahmans of infinite holiness ? Is it the prayer of the earth or the heavens, of the Devas, or Virtue's self ? . . . . . She stood there a very queen of light, a sight to make the very stones melt with love. The very Genius of Beauty acquired new loveliness by mingling with her form'.

In due course Rama was introduced to Janaka who ordered the bow to be brought before the prince. Rama appeared to undertake an impossible task. For had not heroes of mature strength, anxious to win the hand of Sita, tried to bend that bow and failed ? Sita must have prayed in her heart earnestly that he might succeed in bending the bow. For, when Rama saw her for the first time, her eyes also had lighted on him, and she

1 I x 1 (*See Publisher's Note* for elucidation of these reference numbers in this book.)

had decided in her heart that he alone should be her lord. Rama however took the bow without the slightest misgiving. Everybody held his breath and looked on with intense expectation. But they *saw* him take the bow, they only *heard* it snap. Such was Rama's strength and such the ease with which he broke the powerful bow of Shiva. The world was glad and the gods leaped with joy. For was not the union of Rama with Sita to be the cause of the deliverance of the worlds from the tyranny of the Rakshasas ?

Dasharatha was invited to Mithila, and the marriage was celebrated amidst festivities and rejoicing.

The scene changes. The rosy hues of the morning last but a few minutes. Soon the basest clouds ride with ugly rack on the Sun's celestial face 'and from the forlorn world his visage hide'. Great things have to be done for the world by Rama, and great things have never been achieved from on a bed of down.

Dasharatha desired that Rama should be installed as emperor during his own lifetime. He therefore called the assembly of the wise who approved of Rama and consented to his being made their sovereign. The day of installation was fixed for the morrow and Dasharatha gave orders for decorating the city and making other preparations for celebrating the great event with due pomp and ceremony. But Rama was destined not to wear the imperial diadem for fourteen years more.

Now Dasharatha had three wives : Kausalya the mother of Rama, Sumitra the mother of Lakshmana and Shatrughna, and Kaikeyi the mother of Bharata. Among them all Kaikeyi seemed most attached to Rama, but her love was selfish. She saw that Rama was good and brave and valiant, and she nursed her pride when she loved him. When therefore Manthara, one of her maids, told her that if Rama were to obtain the crown, the influence of Kausalya would grow to the detriment of her own, lust of power and jealousy of her rival smothered the affection based on vanity, and she determined that her own son Bharata should be placed upon the throne. Cunningly she made Dasharatha swear that he would grant her prayer whatever it might be, and then she demanded that Bharata should be crowned in place of Rama. The King prayed her, remonstrated with her not to press her request, but she was obdurate. Long before, when he was warring with Asuras, Dasharatha had been saved in the midst of a battle by the personal prowess of this queen, and had then promised her that he would grant her without

question any two requests that she might be pleased to make to him at any time. 'I claim the boons that thou didst once promise me,' she said. 'Thou may'st grant them or refuse them as it pleases thee. The one is the installation of Bharata, and the other is the exile of Rama into the forests for fourteen years'. The King stood aghast. For he had promised to grant her prayers whatever they might be, and his word must be kept, whatever the cost might be. Not ten thousands Ramas should keep him from the performance of his promise. The race of the Sun ought never to be sullied by a promise broken. And so Dasharatha submitted with a mortal pang to her hard-hearted desire and sank on his bed senseless.

Kaikeyi herself now sent for Rama, and he came in his chariot not suspecting what had happened during the previous night. He saluted her with humility and affection as usual. But her heart was made of stone. 'There is one thing, Rama', she said, 'which thy father commands thee to do'. In the words of the poet,

> She said, 'The king commands that all the earth
> By ocean girt thy brother Bharat shall rule;
> And thou shalt wear the twisted knot, and tread
> The forests wide with saintly steps, and bathe
> In sacred waters, and in fourteen years
> Return to fair Ayodhya and live in peace.'
> Can I in words describe how Rama looked
> When fell these cruel words from Kaikai's lips?
> Who can his calmness fitly paint? For what
> It was so like before, the faultless lotus
> Opening to the dawn, his unchanged look
> Outshone in tranquil grace![1]

Rama's reply to Kaikeyi was calm and filled with the heroism of renunciation.

> 'E'en were it not my father's royal will,'
> He said, 'would Ram thy son transgress thy word?
> And Bharata's fortune, can it ever be
> Less dear to me than mine? I say no more:
> I take thy blest command a sacred duty;
> Behold, this very day I start and take
> My leave.'[2]

1 II iii 107-108. 2 II iii 110.

So saying he bowed down at her feet, pressed them to his eyes, saluted the direction where his father lay unconscious, and turned towards his mother's palace.

When Kausalya saw him stand before her alone and unattended,—him, who she was every moment fondly expecting would come with all the signs of new-anointed royalty to see her first and receive a mother's heartful blessing—when she saw him stand there in her presence alone, her heart throbbed with a vague sense of impending evil. And when he prostrated himself at her feet she blessed him with an anxious trembling heart, and then asked him why he had not been crowned that day. The gentle Rama told her, 'It is now decided, mother, that Bharata, thy son, is to be our king.' And the artless queen who loved all the sons of her husband with an equal affection said, 'This is contrary to usage ; but renunciation doth well become thee, son. And, having bestowed the sceptre on thy brother, live with him in friendship and in peace ". Rama was touched to hear her exalted sentiments of disinterested love and was pained at the necessity of having to disillusion her. He told her that the king had commanded him to do a certain thing for the salvation of his soul, and that was that he—Rama—should live in forests in the company of sages, and return in fourteen years. Like a deer struck to the heart by the murderous arrow, she fell to the ground and broke out into heart-rending sobs. But Rama consoled her. He said that nothing should make him disobey his father or make his spoken word a lie, and that she should help him to obey his father's commands. The duty of the wife in the end conquered the affection of the mother, and she blessed him, and with a painful wrench of the heart she let him go.

The news of Rama's impending exile soon spread abroad and reached the ears of Lakshmana. Impetuous was the love which Lakshmana bore to Rama. He swore a great oath that he would place Rama upon the throne, even were the gods of all the worlds to stand between him and his purpose. But Rama met him, spoke gentle words to him, soothed his stormy spirit, and took him to Sumitra. The grand queen loved Rama as her very life. She was filled with grief at the turn that affairs had taken. But consoled by Rama she soon recognised that what must be must not be wept over but endured. Not only this. She commanded her son Lakshmana to accompany Rama in his exile. She addressed him these memorable words: 'Consider Rama as Dasharatha's self and look upon Sita as thy

own mother, myself ; the forests wild shall be to thee as pleasant as Ayodhya ; I bless thee, son, depart with a joyful heart'. Rama prayed her to look after his mother and father and took his leave.

It remained now to broach the unexpected news to Sita and take leave of her. In the presence of Sita, therefore, thrilling with the expectation of seeing him come to her crowned with the imperial diadem, Rama stood, attended by Lakshmana only. When she saw his uncrowned head and forest-dwellers' robes she could not understand at first what it all meant. Rama explained to her the situation and asked leave of her. Then, in the words of the poet,

> She grieved not that her lord his kingdom left
> And throne ; but the words he spoke—'grieve not, my
> love,
> I take thy leave'—did send an arrow through
> Her heart. 'Right holy's thy purpose to obey
> Thy mother's commands,' she said. 'But, lord, thy word
> To me to stay at home when thou dost leave
> An exile for the wilds unknown, that word
> Has pierced my heart'. Said Rama, 'Thy tender feet
> Are not made to tread the stony wilds that burn
> Like molten wax'. 'But can the stony wilds,'
> Said she, 'burn more than separation from
> My Ram?'[1]

So saying, before Rama could frame any reply, she went back into her apartments, put on coarse robes, and without a word more stood by his side ready to accompany him to the forests. All the men and women that witnessed that strong love and quiet determination, wept with renewed grief.

And so they left for the forest, renewed their old friendship with the sturdy forest-chief Guha who rowed them across the Ganga, and wended their way southward.

In the meantime Dasharatha had died of a broken heart. Bharata and Shatrughna were away from Ayodhya while all these things were happening and they were recalled in haste by the council of ministers. As soon as Bharata returned and learned the cause of all this grief he cursed his mother, he

1 II iv 224, 226-228.

cursed himself, he cursed the day that he was born. It broke his heart to think that it was for his sake that Rama had been exiled by his mother, and a great sorrow filled his soul. He determined therefore, to bring back Rama and install him on the throne of the Raghus. He performed the obsequies of his father, put on coarse garments, and went into the forests to seek Rama. The people of Ayodhya burned with a desire to see Rama and bring him back, and so followed Bharata. The forest-chief Guha at first thought that Bharata was come to capture and destroy Rama and wanted to give him battle. But when he saw his garments and grief-stricken appearance his sturdy heart melted and a boundless love and reverence sprang in his heart for Bharata. He then directed him to the road that Rama had taken. Bharata at last met Rama, fell at his feet, and wept like a child. 'Take back the crown that is thine, brother, oh my brother!' he said, but Rama lifted him up, embraced him like a tender father, and told him that he could not go back upon his word, and that until the fourteen years had passed he would not cross back even into the borders of Ayodhya. Bharata's remonstrations were all in vain. At length he made Rama promise that he would be back at Ayodhya on the first day of the fifteenth year. He then vowed that he himself would not enter the capital until that day, but would have the affairs of the kingdom conducted by ministers and wise men, and that if he did not see Rama on that first day of the fifteenth year of Rama's exile he would light a fire and fall into it as accursed both of God and man. The expostulations of Rama would not move him from his resolve and Rama had to promise as he asked him to. Rama then moved southward into the Dekhan forests.

For thirteen years Rama, Lakshmana and Sita lived a life of pastoral peace in the forests. True to his mother's word, Lakshmana did everything to make the life of Rama and Sita as happy as possible. When Rama decided to stay at any place for some considerable time, Lakshmana would make a clearing in the forest, erect a thatched hermitage on a lonely eminence not far from a babbling brook, and plant flowers and creepers around the cottage. He would go into the forest, collect fruits and edible roots for their food, and generally do everything that could conduce to the comfort or add to the happiness of his brother and sister. The deep silence of the forest, the vast panorama of nature around them, the green hillock, the grassy heath, the giant trees upreaching to the vaults of heaven, the

wild creepers hanging luxurious from the tops of the tall trees and reaching to the ground, the cool shade, the scraps of blue sky here and there visible through the dense foliage in the interior of the forest and on that account the more lovely and the more eagerly looked for, all these contributed to their life of Arcadian beauty and sweet simplicity. In the mornings, after the daily baths and customary devotions, the brothers would go out into the jungle and return to the cottage laden with the banana and the bread-fruit and the sweet mango and edible roots, and would lay them before Sita. In the meanwhile Sita would have prepared the welcome meal. After serving them their meal she would partake of the food and then join them in the out-house. As evening drew near, they would go out of the hermitage and enjoy the sublime beauties of the tropical forest. They would listen now to the murmuring of the brook, now to the distant sound of a waterfall, now again to the far off roar of the lion, now to the mellow calls of the sweet-throated *koil* or the tender cooings of the woodland dove. Now they would play with the sportive fawn. And now again they would watch the frolicking monkeys jumping and leaping up the trees. Thus they would enjoy the thousand and one sweet things that Nature shows to those that seek her in her solitudes. Rama would tell Sita stories from the Vedas and ancient Puranas of pastoral loves and city magnificence, of religious calm or daring heroic war, and would raise alternate emotions of love and pity, wonder and admiration in her responsive heart. Sometimes her rich voice at Rama's request would fill the forest solitudes with the very soul of music, and then even the *koil* would hush her tones and acknowledge a master. Thus passed the life of that pair, happy in the unmeasured fulness of each other's love.

But the race of the Rakshasas had to be destroyed and the peaceful course of this perfect love was to be interrupted.

One day Shurpanakha, the sister of Ravana, in her wanderings through the forest saw Rama and at once fell in love with his godlike form. She approached him but he repelled her advances. To revenge herself and to remove the cause, as she thought, of Rama's disregard for her, she attempted to carry away Sita. But Lakshmana who was watching over Sita with a brother's care punished Shurpanakha by mutilating her person. The Rakshasa army, which advanced on Rama to avenge Shurpanakha's wrongs, was completely annihilated by him. So she set off to Lanka and there detailed her griefs to Ravana. She said, falsely,

that she was about to carry away for him a woman of perfect beauty when her husband's brother maimed her, and there she was, injured in his cause. Her description of Sita's beauty maddened Ravana with passion and raised in him an irrepressible desire to possess such a woman. He who had burned with rage on seeing his sister's wrongs and hearing the fate of his army and had sworn to avenge them, now forgot his sister's wrongs and forgot the prowess of him who could single-handed annihilate a whole army, but remembered Sita and remembered her alone. He burned with the desire of making her his wife.

Ravana decided to carry off Sita by stealth. He therefore directed a Rakshasa named Maricha to cross over to the mainland, to take the shape of a golden coloured deer, and to go near Sita and attract her eyes. When she should want Rama to capture him for her, the Rakshasa was to give them the slip and draw Rama into the woods. The plan was that Ravana should then surprise Sita alone and carry her away.

So the golden deer came and frolicked about the hermitage. Sita saw him and was charmed with his seductive beauty and sportiveness and begged Rama to capture him for her. Lakshmana warned Rama that there was some unknown danger lurking behind all this. However, seeing Rama neglect his warnings he himself offered to go, but with a petulant, fateful obstinacy Sita asked Rama himself to go. So Rama went after the deer bow in hand. The disguised Rakshasa however drew him on farther and farther and farther into the interior of the forest. He would stand still pretending to browse the tender grass. But when Rama with cautious step would approach him and be on the point of catching him, he would dart away with lightning speed and begin to sport in a farther field. Rama had run after him for such a long time and had gone so far, and the Rakshasa was so provoking in his deceitful gambols, that he lost his temper and aimed an arrow at him. The Rakshasa was mortally wounded. But even at the moment of death he wanted to serve Ravana, and so he gave up his breath, sending up a groan in the intonations of Rama's voice, and his groan was loud enough to reach the hermitage. Rama saw some great evil in this abnormal cry and hastened back.

But in the meantime Sita heard the Rakshasa's cry and, believing that it was Rama calling for help, asked Lakshmana to look for him in the jungle. Lakshmana apprehended some terrible evil if he left Sita alone, while on the other hand he was absolutely confident that there was no foe living who could

harm Rama in combat. He, therefore, told Sita that no harm could come to Rama and that he should not leave her. But Sita spoke cruel words to him ; and so with a heart heavy with gloomy forebodings he obeyed her and followed in the direction of Rama's steps.

Like a thief Ravana had been watching for this opportunity, and he came in the garb of a religious mendicant before Sita's cottage. The door of the Hindu home is ever open for wayfarers to walk in and claim hospitality, and so he went in. He was welcomed by Sita. In the course of the conversation he fell to praising himself (in the third person) and his rule, while still pretending to be a wandering Sadhu. To her remark that the praise of the Rakshasa did not become a holy man he replied that Ravana was the master of the world today and that it was well to be on the side of the strong. 'Fear not then,' she said ; 'for Rama has sworn to annihilate the Rakshasa with all his army'. The pretended mendicant replied, 'The hare would beat the tusked elephant or the horned deer gore the lion to death if men should be able to destroy the Rakshasas'. He also spoke of the vast size and twenty arms of Ravana.

'Of what avail are twenty arms ?' said Sita. 'For did not Parashu Rama kill Kartavirya, the king of the thousand arms, even he who had kept Ravana in prison for years ?' The allusion to his former defeat and shame struck him in the heart, and burning with rage and foaming with passion, the false form burst and revealed the Rakshasa. As living beings in sight of the awful God of Death, Sita trembled with fear. But Ravana uprooted and lifted sheer the cottage in which she was and placing it in his vast flying chariot flew towards Lanka.

Jatayus a powerful Vulture and a friend of Rama fought with Ravana in mid-air in order to rescue Sita, but Ravana felled him down with the great sword of Shiva and Sita's one forlorn hope was crushed.

In the meantime Lakshmana had found Rama and both hurried home with a beating heart. Sita was not there and the tender-hearted husband was convulsed with grief. There were the marks of large feet and the trail of a heavy chariot on the ground close by. Filled with a thousand anxieties the brothers followed the trail and fell in with the Vulture-King struggling against death. He told them that Sita was carried off by Ravana the Rakshasa king and that he himself had been mortally wounded in his attempt to rescue her. Rama wept tears of gratitude and bitterness at the feet of Jatayus who expired

with Rama's name upon his lips. With a heart bleeding with grief for the loss of Sita and the death of the devoted King of Vultures, Rama performed his obsequies and swore a great oath once again that he would uproot the whole race of Rakshasas.

Rama now pursued his way southward towards Lanka. After a few days' journey he met Sugriva, a chief of the Vanaras,[1] who was living in constant terror of his brother Vali. Rama learned from him that his brother was not only on the look-out to kill him but had even deprived him of his wife. The memory of his recent loss moved Rama to punish the wrong-doer with his own hand. So Vali was killed and Sugriva was anointed king of the Vanaras.

In return for this help Sugriva agreed to take upon himself the task of searching all over the world for Sita and help Rama in recovering her. And the Vanaras were sent in different directions to search for her.

Among those that undertook to wander over the world for Rama's sake was Hanuman, the Indian Hercules. He was the very ideal of strength and endurance and loyal devotion and intuitive wisdom. He had been the first of the Vanaras to see Rama and Lakshmana and at the very first look he had decided that they were not ordinary men but heroes whom it should be an honour and glory to serve. His devotion to Rama was intense. It was the loyalty of immense physical strength to magnificent manhood, of perfect valour to god-like heroism.

Hanuman was among those who went south. He crossed the ocean and reached the city of Lanka. Every palace, every court, every temple, every conceivable place he entered and searched for Sita. He saw Mandodari the wife of Ravana sleeping on a luxurious couch in her apartments. Her perfect beauty suggested to him the thought that she might be Sita. But the richness of her attire and belongings and the absence of any signs of deep grief on her face soon told him that she could not be Sita. He passed. As he was entering the portico of another palace bad portents appeared. And he thought 'Alas! this city, with all her magnificence, is doomed to perish!' He penetrated further and saw the gigantic form of Ravana reposing majestically, but rolling with pain and mental anguish. On seeing him, his first impulse was to wake him and fight with him. But soon second thoughts told him that it was neither wise nor right, for that was not in the instructions given him by Rama.

1 Powerful monkeys.

And 'as the ocean main, though powerful enough to dash down the shore and flood the earth, yet bides its time and leaves not its appointed limits', even so did Hanuman check his impulse and leave Ravana to the proper vengeance of Rama.

At last after a thousand anxieties he saw Sita in a grove of Ashoka trees. There she was, surrounded by Rakshasis, like a deer in the midst of leopards, the colour faded from her cheek, her eyes raining a perpetual shower of tears, her form lean and emaciated, her hair one twisted knot—there she was like a picture smoked, like the moon eclipsed, like the lotus killed by frost. 'Might it be that my lord had not met Lakshmana?' she was saying to herself. 'How could he know that I am here, in this sea-girt island? Or would he have spurned me as unworthy of him, for that I had spoken harsh words to Lakshmana? Oh who would give him the tasteful betel-leaf? And how he would grieve when he sees a guest!' She would think on that lion face that was not overcast at the sudden command of exile, that face which, both when asked by his father to accept the imperial crown as well as when commanded to leave all and live a forest life, like the pictured lotus was ever the same! She wept for the iron arm that broke Shiva's bow. She thought of Rama's grief when Bharata refused the crown and condemned himself to a forest life, and she wept.

It was in the midst of these reflections that Hanuman saw her. He saw and he felt that it was she. He blessed Rama, he blessed her stainless virtue, he blessed her father's race. While he was in this state of grateful joy at seeing Sita alive and pure, Ravana appeared on the scene. This was one of his many visits to Sita to attempt to persuade her to repudiate Rama and marry him. He recounted to her his greatness, his strength, and his powers, his victories in the past and his present prosperity. All his wealth, his power, his very sceptre he said, he would place at her feet and himself would remain her slave, if she would but consent to wed him. On hearing these words grown more hateful by constant repetition, Sita's face burned with indignation and wifely pride, and she replied to him in these words:

> 'To pierce mount Meru, to shatter the vault of heaven, to annihilate the fourteen worlds, is not one arrow from Rama's quiver sufficient? Thou wert afraid of that arrow and that arm: therefore is it that thou camest like a thief and carriedst me away here in his absence. Dost thou affect to despise my lord and his brother for that they are men?

It was a man that killed Kartavirya, the same Kartavirya who imprisoned thee in former days. Think'st thou that they are only two ? He that ends the world and all in it is only one . . . Knowest thou not that Parashu Rama quailed before my blessed lord—even that Parashu Rama who killed Kartavirya, whom I worship because he kept thee once in close confinement.'

She would have continued further, but Ravana could not endure it any longer. Conflicting emotions rent his heart, but at length he spoke these words :

'My first impulse, Sita, was to put thee to the sword for daring to use such words to me. But, O my love, if I kill thee, I kill myself. Thou mockest me with my defeats, as thou callest them. But were they reverses ? They were all sport, my victories as well as my defeats. And thinkest thou I was afraid to meet Rama in battle ? No ! for if he had died as die he must against me fighting, thou, who even now continuest to love him, wouldst have put an end to thy life. It is to guard against this that I brought thee away in secret. Grant that I failed in war against my foes ; how comes it that I rule the earth and heaven, and without a second ? Though I should never willingly expend my wrath upon these pigmies who are wasting their life in austerities, yet for thy sake I shall even stain my valour that has extinguished the might of the Supreme Three and gods, and stoop to fight these feeble folk. But I shall not kill them—I shall merely bring them over here and make them my slaves. Though they are worthless puny men, they deserve not to die, at least for the service they have done me in having brought thee within my reach. But if thou wantest them killed, if thou canst believe in my strength only when I destroy them, if that alone will please thee, I shall even kill them.'

The mention of blood inflamed his wrath once again and he continued, trying also to see if threats could make her yield. He said,

'I shall even go to Ayodhya and, putting to death Bharata with all his host, I shall march on Mithila like the Fire of the Day of Dissolution, and after uprooting thy kith and kin I shall drink thy blood also ! Thou art bringing thy own end nearer by provoking me, O Sita !'

And then looking at his flashing steel he frowned and said,

'There are but two months left, within which thou must yield. If thou dost not become mine within that time I

shall kill thee straight!'

So saying he frowned and went his way, 'bearing her image away in his heart'.

Hanuman had been watching this interview with a beating heart.

In the meanwhile, however, despair had seized the heart of Sita. She had been hoping against hope that Rama would come and rescue her. But days and months had passed and there were no signs of Rama coming, and the Rakshasa always returned, unabashed by previous insults, to press his suit. She could not endure her situation any longer. So, as soon as Ravana went away, she went near a tree with the intention of ending her life there. But just then Hanuman revealed himself to her and told her that he came from Rama. The sound of that beloved name fell like angel's music upon her ears—it was the falling rain that bathed her heart which was fading away under the shadow of despair. Hanuman gave her Rama's ring as a sign that he was the genuine messenger of Rama. She set her eyes on it. How shall we describe her, says the poet, how she changed, and what she said when she beheld that well-remembered ring? What will be the joy of the dead man if he starts back into life? What will be the joy of the bereaved mother when she sees her deceased child brought back to life? What will be the delight of the blind man when he gains the use of his eyes? Even such joy and such delight were Sita's when she saw that mute messenger of Rama's love. She took it into her hand, pressed it to her eyes, pressed it to her lips, pressed it to her bosom. Her whole frame swelled with joy—she smiled, she wept. Rama's ring was the philosopher's stone that turned her fading colour to gold. She blessed Hanuman with a fervent, heartful blessing:

> 'O thou that brought'st me the message from Rama and gavest me life—a father thou to me and mother, and a fount of loving mercy besides—thou hast earned glory for this life and for all time to come. O hero of the mountain chest! O thou who has lifted a heavy burden from off my heart! If I be one who knows not ill, if my heart be pure and conduct right, may my blessing never fail, may eternity be to thee like unto a day, and live thou for ever and for ever!'

She then took from her head her head-ornament and handed it over to Hanuman desiring him to give it to Rama as a sign of her trust in him.

Hanuman, however, did not want to cross back to the continent without giving a taste of his prowess to the people of Lanka. He

destroyed groves and palaces, felled down the Rakshasas that were sent against him, and, when taken prisoner before Ravana, defied him. Ravana commanded that Hanuman's tail should be set on fire but when it was aflame Hanuman leaped all over Lanka lashing his tail far and wide, and thus burning down the Rakshasa capital he leaped back to the mainland. He himself escaped the effects of the fire through the blessing of Sita who prayed to the God of Fire to spare him.

Rama learned from the lips of Hanuman that Sita was living a life of martyrdom. His wrath was roused and he commanded Sugriva's army to cross over to the island. The Vanaras built a bridge by throwing big rocks and trees into the channel separating Lanka from the mainland, and over it the Vanara army marched to Lanka. And the great war began.

The war was a war of heroes. The first day Ravana himself led his army. But before the sun set his army was gone, his chariot was broken into pieces, his bow was split in twain, his very sword was broken in his hands. The chivalry of Rama saved him his life. And he warned him that he was doomed unless he gave up Sita. Ravana, however, did not speak a word and returned silent and sullen. Says the poet, 'he grieved not that all the foes he used to mock in ancient days would now jeer at him; but he grieved that Sita of the lance-like look would smile at his empty boasts and mock at his wordy valour.' As a soldier and warrior he wonders at Rama's valour and strength. He tells Malayavan, his grandfather,

'When all my mighty strength was being crushed
By clouds of darts from his death-showering bow,
Think'st thou that there was care in his look? Oh no.
His tranquil face showed careless sport, not war!
I've faced the thunderbolt of Heaven's king,
The triple lance of awful Dhurjati,[1]
The flaming disk of Vishnu, first of Gods,—
But what are they to Rama's fiery dart?
Of all the masters of the art of war,
Though Vishnu is the first, I did believe
That none could strive against great Kartavir;
But even he isn't worth the fallen dust
Of Lakshman's feet; what then of mighty Ram?
I tell thee, father, it humbled Ravan's valour.
Oh father, if Janaki of patience like

[1] Shiva.

The earth, should see his feats of valour on
The field, she'd hold the God of Love himself
And me as nothing better than tailed curs.' [1]

However, a few words from Mahodara, his chief minister, were sufficient to make Ravana forget the prowess of his adversary. At Mahodara's suggestion Ravana's brother, Kumbhakarna was awakened from his age-long sleep. But when he came to know the purpose for which he was called, he advised Ravana to give up Sita. Ravana paled with fury when he heard his words. 'I called thee not to seek thy advice', he said. 'I thought thou wert a warrior bold—I did not know that thou hadst forgotten all thy valour. Thou may'st go and worship men'. A Rakshasa of immense size and a hero of faultless valour, Kumbhakarna was wounded at his brother's words. 'Pardon me my hasty words,' he said, 'I shall take my club and go to battle. But think not that I shall come back bearing victory or my life. At least after my death, O my brother, release Sita and save thy life with honour. If they conquer me and live, O lord of Lanka, be sure that they would vanquish thee. So, at least after I shall have died on the field, give up that Pearl of Chastity. Pardon me any wrongs that I may have committed against thee. Thy blessed face I am not given to see again. I take thy leave.' So saying, he went forth to battle. And Ravana wept.

Now another of the brothers of Ravana, Vibhishana by name, had left Ravana when he refused to give up Sita, and was now with Rama. With Rama's permission he came to Kumbhakarna and advised him to come to the side of Rama. The reply of Kumbhakarna was most heroic. He said,

'It is right to warn a misguided king and point to him his good. But when he persists in his evil course and he is doomed to fall, is it not infinitely better for me to die before him than live to see him fall! He is lord of all the world, the most valiant among the valiant, the bravest among the brave. Shall he enter Yama's kingdom[2] alone and without a brother by his side? It is appointed that Rama shall end Ravana. Shall I who have vanquished even the God of death bow down before a mere man, and he my brother's foe? Go back, my brother, and live with the victor, for though a Rakshasa, the creator has made thee virtuous and good. As for me, let me do the duty I owe to my liege and

[1] VI v 17, 23, 25, 27, 30.

[2] The other world.

lost my life in his fight. But not alone shall I die! Hanuman, Sugriva, and Vali's son—why, none of the monkey kind shall return alive if they are rash enough to fight today.'

The battle began. The Vanara army swayed to and fro unable to bear the shock of Kumbhakarna's attack. Great was the loss on the side of Rama. Wherever he attacked, Kumbhakarna carried death with him. But at length Rama's arrow cut off his head and the Rakshasa army was annihilated.

In the meantime, at Lanka, Ravana was again pressing Sita to accept him. This time also he experienced the same repulse. Sita's reply is superb and it is impossible to conceive of greater heroism or devotion on the part of woman. Neither the majestic form of the Rakshasa king, nor his prosperity—for the gods were his servants—, nor his fame had any attractions for her. She said in the course of her superb reply :

'Think not I love my wasted form, think not I love my life. Think not that I fear to die and earn a glorious name. It is not fear of death that makes me live and endure thy hateful words. The hope of once again seeing my blessed lord—whose ornaments are his virtues—it is this alone that reconciles me to life. I long to see the day when, with Lakshmana guarding his holy person, his arrows shall send thee to the other world; and that is why I do not yet end myself.'

It was in the course of this interview that messengers brought to Lanka the news of Kumbhakarna's fall. And great was the grief of Ravana.

But the war went on. And his passion for Sita increased with every defeat.

Ravan's son Meghanada, who was called Indrajit for having conquered Indra, next led an army against Rama. Twice he was victorious, but the third time he was completely routed. He too, whom the poet admiringly describes as the first among those who wield the bow, grew hopeless. And with trembling heart and awe-filled look he told Ravana that it was useless to contend against Rama and Lakshmana and that the release of Sita alone would save the kingdom.

When he heard these words Ravana laughed a great laugh. And in lines pregnant with heroic thought Ravana addressed his son :

'It is not with the hope that those who have hitherto died on the field would bring me victory, it is not with the hope that those who yet live would win me success, it is not

with the hope that thou wouldst vanquish me my foes— it is not with any of these hopes that I provoked this foe. I relied on myself and myself alone and entered into this war. Keep thy niddering[1] counsel to thyself, son. This mortal frame, in duration like a bubble on the waters, I would fain lay down on the battle-field in full sight of the Devas, earning fame that will never have an end—but I will not give up Sita. Is it for releasing her that I possess twenty arms? Even should I fall, even then, so long as the Vedas will last my name will also stand, if Rama's name will live. Death is certain—no one escapes that—man today is, tomorrow he ceases to be—but when does Fame cease to live? Let me send away Sita, then who will count me as Ravana? The very gods will laugh, and casting their fear away will come and besiege this my city. Even if I be doomed to fall, it is not in me to stoop to littleness; have I not carried my victorious arms to the ten[2] directions? As for thee, thou may'st go to thy home and, removing the barbs from thy arm, thou may'st rest on thy couch sleeping both day and night.'

And in the same breath, like a tiger enraged he thundered forth, 'Bring me my war-chariot!'

Indrajit was cowed. He fell at his father's feet and begged to be pardoned. 'I go' he said; 'but I shall not return. May better counsels prevail at least after I am gone.' So saying the doomed Rakshasa went back to the battle-field.

A fierce battle did he fight. Like a lion at bay he fought with desperate valour. But an arrow from Lakshmana's bow ended him and he fell a headless corpse.

When Ravana was informed of his death his grief knew no bounds. Tenderly does the poet sing of the father's inconsolable grief at the loss of his heroic son. I shall give the purport of but one stanza here. "If thy Gandharva, Yaksha, Siddha, and Rakshasa wives, silver-tongued they one and all, will fall at my feet and ask me 'where is our lord?' shall I only weep in chorus with them, my son?" Mandodari, the mother of Indrajit was even more inconsolable. The poet depicts with sympathy the poignant grief of the mother's heart. Here is the translation of two stanzas:

> 'When like the waxing moon, thou grew'st in years,
> I had the fortune, my son, with pride to see

1 niddering = a simpleton.
2 eight cardinal points, the heavens above and nether regions.

Thee conquer Indra ; but now thy headless corpse
To see and mourn—O son, what have I done
To behold this plight ? And still I cling to life,
Inconstant life ! [1]
In olden blessed days,
With tinkling anklets when thou wert yet a child
Slow-crawling on the ground, thou brought'st a pair
Of fierce lions and made them fight like rams :
When shall I once again such sight behold ! ' [2]

And she has forebodings that Ravana's life too is doomed. She says,

' Of all the hosts that out of Lanka marched
To meet in battle Rama and his force,
None has as yet with life returned. Alas !
Like stubble they have gone, at touch of fire !
Alas ! I fear that Sita's sacred charms,
Destiny-like will drive my Ravan too
To an untimely, gory death ! [3]

But evil counsels still prevailed. The first day's awful massacre, Kumbhakarna's fall, the death of Indrajit, the failure of numbers of armies that were despatched after that, from none of these did Ravana learn his lesson. He was destined to learn it only at the cost of his life.

Determined to make one bold and final stand he collected his army and himself marched at its head. Grand was the sight of that army. The mighty form and fierce aspect of Ravana created a panic in the Vanara army. The Rakshasas fought with desperate valour. But Rama and Lakshmana and Hanuman encouraged their forces and re-established their line. Ravana fought like a lion of the forest. But his hour was come. And Rama bent his Kodanda [4] and out sped his fearful arrow direct to Ravana's heart.

It quenched his three crore years of mortal life,
It quenched the strength of all his austerities,
It quenched the word of Brahma granting him
Perpetual victory ; it quenched his strength
That bent the world beneath his awful rule ;
It pierced his adamant chest and quenched his life.
Such was the force of Rama's sacred dart. [5]

1 VI xxviii 47.
2 VI xxviii 49.
3 VI xxviii 53.
4 The name of Rama's bow.
5 VI xxxvi 198

So Ravana fell. But even when he fell there was a majesty about him which the poet describes with the greatest admiration :

> His mighty wrath, fierce as the untamed lion's
> Was quenched in blood ; his awful strength was gone ;
> His powerful arms had ceased to move ; his love
> Consuming like volcanic fire, which filled
> His heart, had ceased to beat ; but the hero's face
> Ev'n at that awful moment wore a look
> Of majesty, surpassing all its splendour
> Ev'n of days when saints and Rishis had
> To flee from his oppressive rule ![1]

So the prophecy was fulfilled and the world was freed once more of the spirit of evil.

Sita was released from her prison. But her trials were not ended. Rama insulted her in sight of the assembled leaders and army saying that women of honour in her condition would have committed suicide and not have lived in the enemy's city for one whole year. The whole assembly wept at these cruel words. Sita's heart was broken. She asked Lakshmana to prepare a fire so that she might end herself in the flames. But when she fell into the fire, the Fire would not burn her. On the contrary, the God of Fire was burned by the fire of her purity ! And Rama now accepted Sita.

The fourteen years of exile were now over. Rama, Sita and Lakshmana travelled homeward in an aerial car accompanied by Vibhishana and the Vanara army.

In the meantime, Bharata saw the last day of the fourteenth year dawn and yet there were no signs of Rama's coming home. He had never forgotten that Rama was sent into exile for his sake and the thought had been consuming him every day these fourteen years. So he lit a fire with the intention of burning himself to death. Rama, however, had always in his mind Bharata's vow and that was why he travelled in the aerial car. To provide against every eventuality he also sent swift-flying Hanuman to where Bharata was, to tell him of his coming.

Hanuman surprises Bharata in the act of walking round the fire and assures him of Rama's approach. Rama also arrives soon, consoles Bharata, and offers to crown him. But Bharata refuses the crown once again and Rama is crowned Emperor of Aryavarta to the delight of all the worlds.

1 VI xxxvi 201.

CHAPTER III

IN MEDIAS RES.[1]

The reader will have noticed that the Ramayana follows in its natural order the life of the hero from his birth and childhood up to the close of the action which forms its theme. On the other hand the epics of Europe, as is well known, follow their prototype and example, the *Iliad,* and start the story as near the end as possible, filling in the earlier events by slight allusions as well as by episodic narrative. These epics have an undeniable advantage over the Indian *Maha Kavyas* in that their dramatic opening arrests the imagination even at the very commencement of the poem, while the Indian epics have to gather some momentum before they are able to carry with them the attention of the modern reader. But our great epic poets have proved that one may tell a story in chronological order and yet write a poem that generations will not willingly let die.

It is Aristotle that first formulated the rule that the story of the epic should not be told in chronological order. He says in the 23rd chapter of his *Poetics* as follows :

> "Concerning the poetry which is narrative and imitative in metre, it is evident that it ought to have dramatic fables in the same manner as tragedy and should be conversant with one whole and perfect action which has a beginning, middle, and end in order that, like one whole animal it may produce its appropriate pleasure, and that it may not be after the fashion of histories in which it is not necessary to treat of one action, but of one time. . . . Hence in this respect also Homer will appear to be divine when compared with other poets, because he did not attempt to sing of the whole Trojan War though it had a beginning and an end. For if he had, it would have been very large, and not sufficiently conspicuous, or if it had been of a moderate size, it would have been intricate through the variety of incidents. But now, having selected one part of the war, he has made use of many episodes, such as the catalogue of ships and other such ones with which he has embellished his poem."

[1] Into the Midst of Things.

Horace has followed Aristotle closely, and he too has given his sanction to this canon. For after praising Homer's manner of beginning the *Odyssey* he says in his *Art of Poetry*,

"To sing of the return of Diomed, the poet does not ascend up to the death of Meleager; in singing of the Trojan War he does not begin with the two eggs of Leda. On the other hand, he hastens with the reader into the very midst of the action[1] taking for granted that he is fully acquainted with the story."

The authority of these masters—to which we should add also the example of Virgil—has overshadowed all later literary criticism, and we find almost all European poets and critics make a fetish of this rule and bow down before it. Milton followed it consciously and deliberately as we see that he uses the very words of Horace in his argument to the First Book of the *Paradise Lost*: 'which action passed over, the poem hastens into the midst of things' etc. Boileau writes in his *L'art Poetique* in this wise: "Away with those halting rhymers whose phlegmatic spirit would make them preserve the order didactic even in their *elan!* Poor annalists, who while singing the exploits of a hero follow the order of events! They dare not leave one incident out of sight. Apollo was never liberal with his fire to such as these!"

Dacier, Boileau's contemporary, was so much obsessed with this rule that he wrote a very elaborate commentary to the following effect on three lines of Horace: [2]

"Horace reveals here one of the greatest secrets of the art of poetry. A historian always follows the order of events. But the order which poets follow in the treatment of their subject is entirely different. For in the drama, as in the epic, the great masters place the opening of the scene as near to the catastrophe as possible, and take hold of the action always near the end. Their art enables them to bring back before our eyes all that had gone before. Homer, Sophocles and Euripedes have never departed from this rule, and it is an admirable one. For in

[1] *In medias res, non secus ac notas, auditorem rapit.*

[2] *Ordinis hœc virtus erit et venus, aut ego fallor,*
Ut jam nunc dicat, jam nunc debentia dici,
Pleraque differat, et prœsens in tempus omittat.

These lines may be translated thus: 'In the matter of the order of a poem, merit and gracefulness consist, if I am not mistaken, in saying at the commencement those things that ought to be said in the beginning, and in postponing several things to the end, abstaining from treating them in the beginning of the poem.'

postponing the catastrophe which we are awaiting every instant, and in interposing between it and us a series of probable and natural incidents, they awaken our curiosity and excite in us one after another all the passions—a thing which a methodical arrangement can never do. In order to be convinced of the truth of this, one has only to read Apollonius of Rhodes who has written a poem on the Argonauts. Longinus admits that there is not a single fault in this work; but it is mortally weary reading. One could give several reasons as to why this should be so, but the principal reason is its chronological sequence. It is methodic throughout, and that is the worst error into which an author could have fallen; for there are none more cold than those poets,

> 'Who singing of a hero the exploits grand
> Poor annalists, pursue the events' course.'

"Vida has treated at length this question of arrangement in the Second Book of his *Poetics*, where he says finely that the reader, carried by the art of the poet to the very end of an action, and filled with a vain hope, commences the reading of the poem with the greatest alacrity believing that he is very near the conclusion of the story, just as a man who sees his port imagines that he is about to enter into it; but he is much farther from it than he imagines—he is fated to retrace his course and fly over many a sea. He then adds that a wise poet will never begin, to take an example, the Trojan War at the judgment of Paris and place every incident in its natural order as if he were writing annals or a journal and not a poem."

We have quoted these extracts at some length purposely as we want the reader to realise how deep and widespread is this superstition in the West with regard to the order of narrative in the graver poems. But, as we have said before, our epic poets have shown that the rule in question is not as absolute as western critics seem to imagine. For our poets have followed the chronological order in their great poems, and yet have succeeded in producing epics that are as fresh today as when they first issued from their lips. Valmiki sang our first national epic. He has called it variously as *the Life of Rama, the Destruction of Ravana or the Grand Story of Sita*, and in fact the whole life story of Rama and Sita up to the overthrow of Ravana is described in its natural order in the epic proper. And yet the interest of the story never flags for a moment in the

whole course of the poem which is very nearly three times as long as Homer's *Iliad* ; on the contrary the interest grows steadily until the very end is reached. The same will be found to be the case with the *Mahabharata* if we remove the didactic portions like the *Shanti* and the *Anushashana Parvas,* which seem to have been added by our sires to the main story in order to give it an encyclopædic character. Our own poet Kamban has not departed from the chronological order in the treatment of his poem, and yet the whole story in his hands rises into a crescendo of interest from the commencement till the very close of the action.

As a matter of fact, it is not the 'hastening into the midst of things', or 'the taking hold of the action near the end' that has given Homer the first place among the poets of the west[1]. But rather it is his superb knowledge of the human heart with all its joys and sorrows, and his love of Nature in all her aspects, joined to a rich imagination and a noble earnestness of purpose, all guided by the indefinable but supreme quality of poetic tact that knows how to make all the parts adhere together into a single organic whole—it is these we say, that have made him the greatest of western poets and the *Iliad* the greatest of western epics. The liquid flow of his story and his majestic style are but the natural results of these grand qualities. But not satisfied with giving Homer the first place among the poets of the West, or even, if they pleased, to satisfy their chauvinistic pride, the first place among the poets of the World, European critics have made him into a sort of tyrant of the Republic of Letters, raising every single trait and trick of his grand poems into an immutable law which every other poet disobeys at the cost of his reputation.

The rule in question, however, is so artificial that none can give any substantial reason as to why it should be so. We have seen above how Vida supported it. But we wonder if any reader has ever deluded himself on reading the opening lines of the *Æneid* that *Æneas* was at the end of his labours and was

[1] It is out of our province to discuss here the unitarian authorship or otherwise of the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*. The question is far from being settled as yet. But we may take it that there was a poet in Asia Minor who called himself Homer and who had a great deal to do with the Homeric poems. We shall in this study merely accept the tradition, and always speak of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as the works of Homer. There is the same difficulty with regard to the authorship of the original Samskrit *Ramayana*. Here also we shall only accept the tradition and generally speak of it as the production of Valmiki and Valmiki alone.

going immediately to plant the seed of the Roman Empire on Italian soil.[1] Nor do we believe that the opening lines of the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* create the delusion that the end of the narrative is not far off. Such a delusion might conceivably be induced in the minds of scholars who are deciphering an unknown poem in a forgotten language; but how can we suppose that the reader of any well-known epic will believe that his business as reader and the poet's business as narrator is going to end at the very threshold of the poem? Great poets are able, of course, by their supreme art to throw us off our guard at the critical moments of the story and make us hope and almost expect that a great misfortune that threatens the hero may pass over, and may not materialise. But the delusion that Vida and Dacier require to support the *dicta* of Aristotle and Horace is something entirely different, and we do not believe that any reader of the great western epics has ever experienced such a feeling.

The real advantage of opening the story near the end of the catastrophe consists in this that the interest of the reader is captured at once at the very commencement of the poem. But this method has a compensating disadvantage in that the poet is obliged to cry halt to the action before he has proceeded very far, and to narrate the earlier portions of the story which are bound to be much less interesting than the main action. Even the greatest poets have to beat time with flat verses till they judge that the epic has drawn itself out to a length sufficient to allow the taking up of the main thread of the story. On the other hand, the chronological order followed by eastern poets, if it makes the beginning of the poem plain and unadorned, has this great advantage that the interest of the story gathers force in an ever progressive degree to the very end of the poem.

Thus Kamban's *Ramayana* is divided into six books. The First Book describes the birth and education of Rama and his marriage with Sita on whose beauty and spotless chastity turns the catastrophe of the epic. In this book we have many episodes, most of which may well have been suppressed. In the Second Book, we have the plot of Manthara and Kaikeyi to thwart Rama's coronation, and as a consequence to bring about Rama's exile to the forests. The Third Book, which is

1 The reader will have noticed how this view conflicts with that of Horace when he says, '*in medias res, non secus ac notas, auditorem rapit*'—the poet hastens the reader into the very midst of the action, *taking for granted that he is fully acquainted with the story.*

called the *Jungle Book,* brings Ravana upon the scene, who carries away Sita from Rama's cottage home in the forest. This forms the seed of the action proper of the poem. The Fourth Book is episodic in appearance, but in reality it introduces to us the Vanara hosts who are to play such a large part in the war. The character of Vali is superbly drawn, and we are made to feel that we can never have enough of this hero's majestic words. The next book, distinguished as the Book of Beauty gives us the sublime picture of Sita standing firm in her chastity in the midst of temptations and threats. This increases tenfold our moral indignation against Ravana and prepares us for the war in the last book which is called the Book of Battles, and in which is described with great power the fall of Ravana's generals and finally of Ravana himself.

It will be seen from the above that Kamban is able to make the story rise steadily in interest from beginning to end. Compare this with the *Paradise Lost,* written by one of the greatest poets of any age or country but who felt himself bound by the example of the *Iliad* and the rule of Aristotle which we have quoted above. In this poem the four books from the fifth to the eighth deal with the war of the angels in heaven and the creation of the world and man ; while the eleventh book and the greater part of the twelfth deal with the vision of the future shown by the Archangel Michæl to Adam. But these books, though they are beautiful in themselves, and are artfully soldered on to what goes before and after, still create the impression that the action is interrupted merely for the sake of the episodes.[1] If even Milton has found it a difficult matter to make his episodes organic and integral parts of his epic, it is no wonder that lesser poets who have submitted themselves to this canon of Aristotle have been unable to keep their episodes from bulging out of the general *cadre* of their story.

Thus we see that the rule of opening the epic *in medias res* has at least as much disadvantage as it has advantage, while the chronological method, if it does not ensure an arresting beginning to the poem, has at least the advantage of keeping it from turning sloppy in the middle.

[1] It is indeed a question if the tendency on the part of later poets to introduce the earlier portions of the story episodically as if narrated by one character to another, is not due to Aristotle's dictum, based on the example of Homer, that the author of an epic should seldom speak himself, but should throw as much of this work as he can into the mouths of those who are his principal actors.

From treating the story chronologically flows another result, namely that the poet is able to make the main story occupy a longer period of time than if he followed Aristotle's rule. This may not be considered an advantage by western critics. But there seems to be a greater fullness of life and greater stateliness in an epic which deals poetically and with art with the birth and youth and manhood of his hero and his achievements.

But after all these are secondary matters. If we prefer the chronological treatment of the oriental epics for their steadily increasing interest and for their greater stateliness, we are not blind to the grand poetical qualities of the epics as understood by Homer and Milton. We can appreciate the art that takes up the action near the catastrophe and is able to weave into the story the details that give it greater volume and fullness. We claim only that the *in medias res* theory should not be raised into an absolute rule, disobedience to which *ipso facto* throws the epic into the second rank.

I think we may conveniently consider here the length of our epic. Kamban's *Ramayana* contains 10,569 stanzas of four lines each. Being about thrice the length of the *Iliad*, it may be thought to be over-long for an epic. But Valmiki's *Ramayana* in the southern recension, contains 21,018 *shlokas*, the vast majority of which consist of two lines each.[1] The *Mahabharata* goes up to 100,000 *shlokas*. And Chand Bhat's *Prithivi Raj Rasa* is said to be at least as long as the *Mahabharata*.

There is of course no fixed rule as to how long an epic should be. Dandi, a Samskrit critic, only says that it should be *asamkshipta*, that is, not short. It is of course allowed by western as well as eastern critics to be so long as to be incapable of being read through at a single sitting. And if it cannot be finished at one sitting it does not matter how long it is, provided that it is *rasabhava-nirantara* i.e. satisfies our sense of the grand and the beautiful by appealing to the higher emotions in an artistic manner.

We have heard of a Japanese novel, of which even the 200th volume or so which has been recently[2] published has not brought the end of the story in view. This story makes, we need not say, an extreme demand upon the patience of the reader, but even here we do not know if the book finds any detractors in Japan on account of its length. However, while we are not

[1] We exclude from the calculation the Seventh Book which is of the nature of the cyclic poems of Greece.

[2] About 1920.

prepared to go as far as the author of our Japanese novel, we can allow the epic poet to choose for himself how long he will make his poem. If popularity with the mass of the people, as well as with the learned, is a test of the justness of a poet's choice as to length, we find that Indian epics, long as they are, have been listened to from beginning to end without flagging enthusiasm as they are read and explained by Pandits during evenings continuously for many months at a stretch. And as Kamban's *Ramayana* holds the reader's interest sustained up to the very end, we cannot condemn it as excessively long, but on the contrary we should be thankful to the poet for providing us with such abundance of rich and delicate food for our imagination and our spirit.

CHAPTER IV

THE ARCHITECTONICS OF THE RAMAYANA

The build and the structure of the *Ramayana* of Kamban are superb. The poem satisfies the soul with its *ampleur,* the proportion of its parts, and the art with which the parts are combined into an organic whole. It is true that the story follows the order of events chronologically. But there are a hundred ways in which a story can be narrated even in the chronological order, and it is in the choice that the poet makes from among these that we see whether he is the supreme artist or an ordinary writer. And Kamban has shown his genius for the architectonics of poetry both where he follows Valmiki as well as where he departs from his order.

The question of the build of the epic is not treated in detail in any of the treatises of rhetoric in Samskrit that have come to light up to now. There must have existed books which examined this question deeply, for we cannot imagine that a people who have laid down elaborate rules for the construction of the drama could have neglected such an obvious subject of critical study as the detailed anatomy of the epic poem. These are either lost to us or are waiting to be discovered in the *Bhandaras*[1] of our temples and of our States. The rhetorical works that have been printed up to now discuss generally only questions of style, figures of speech, and the emotions as subjects of poetical treatment. *The Mahakavya Lakshanas,* so called, are not much more than lists of what subjects should be necessarily treated or described in an epic.

In the *Kavyadarsha,* however, Dandin, after describing ten figures of speech finishes with three *shlokas* on what he calls *Bhavika.* He says,

> "*Bhavika* is said to the essential quality of the *Prabandha* or poem; for *bhava* is the idea of the poet as to how he should arrange the poem and set forth its parts. The mutual harmony of the parts both in the subject matter as well as in the canto divisions; the leaving out of useless incidents and the placing of everything in its proper place; the individuality and character in the treatment even of the sublime which comes of a vigorous diction and well-ordered

1 archives.

words—all this is the result of *bhava, i.e.*, the inner poetical sense. And the right employment of the *bhava* gives rise to the quality called *Bhavika*."

In the above lines is contained, though in mere skeleton, the whole theory as to how the epic, as any other kind of long poem, should be constructed. It is interesting to compare these lines with the words of Aristotle in reference to the same matter, that the epic should be a unity like one whole animal. The animal has different organs, no doubt, but all its organs adhere together perfectly to make up that one animal. The author of the *Mahabharata* too, we may note in passing, compares his work to a majestic tree with branches and stem, and fruits and flowers, but which in its entirety is a single whole. The epic, therefore, should be a unity, with parts of course, but parts which go to make up and show off that unity.

Now the one action of the *Ramayana*, as Valmiki proposes in the beginning of the poem, is the destruction of Ravana, and every incident of the story contributes to this end. This idea is never absent from the mind of Kamban. When Tadaka, who comes to spoil the sacrifice of Vishvamitra, falls by the arrow of Rama, she looks, according to him, 'like Ravana's standard of victory felled down to the ground as a foreboding of his future fate'. When Kaikeyi yields to the evil advice of Manthara, it is

> Because the promise must be fulfilled now
> That Vishnu to the gods had made, because
> The gods did work their *maya*, and the saints
> Had earned the fruit of virtuous deeds, and cup
> Of Rakshas sins was full,—her heart was hardened.
> For if the world to-day the ambrosial strains
> Of Rama's praise doth drink, doth not it owe
> The joy to Kaikeyi's cruelty ? [1]

And when Ravana lies dead on the field, Mandodari lamenting his death says, among other things,

> The fairy charms of Sita, her chastity
> Divine, the passion of my Ravana,
> Shurpanakha's disgrace, and banishment
> Of Rama by command of the King of kings,
> All these and more, what are they but the fruit
> Of Indra's great austerities ? [2]

1 II ii 77, 78. 2 VI xxxvi 241.

Here we see the poet referring all these different incidents as leading but to one only end, namely, the destruction of Ravana, for it is only after Ravana was destroyed that Indra could get back his heavenly kingdom.

Let us now examine the plot of the *Ramayana* in some detail. In the beginning of the First Book, the destruction of Ravana is proposed, and Vishnu Himself promises to come into the world as the son of Dasharatha and destroy the Rakshasa. The interest of the reader is from that moment fixed upon Rama, the *avatar* of the Supreme God, and all his doings. The First Book is taken up with the exploits of Rama's youth and his marriage with Sita who is the incarnation of Lakshmi. The killing of Tadaka, the episode of Ahalya, the love of Rama for Sita and of Sita for Rama, Rama's bending and breaking of the mighty bow of Shiva, Parashu Rama's pride and its punishment, all these form a number of varied incidents interesting in themselves and at the same time calculated to make the reader expect high things of Rama. The march of this book is rather slow owing to the various episodes that are cast in the form of stories told by Vishvamitra to Rama and by Shatananda to Janaka. The journey of Dasharatha to Mithila which Valmiki describes in but one or two *shlokas* is elaborately described by Kamban in four *Patalas*[1] which take up about 300 stanzas. This is a great deal too much. But these *patalas* occur in the First Book before the epic has gathered its proper momentum. Moreover, many of the stanzas in these cantos are of great idyllic beauty.

In the Second Book, Rama's character is magnificently developed in his attitude towards Kaikeyi, Kausalya, and Lakshmana. The story too marches rapidly. The conversations between the several persons here are pitched in a high key, and the nerves of the reader become highly strung even at the thousandth reading. Between every one of these meetings, the pitch is lowered a little for the reader to take breath before he is confronted with the next scene of high-strung emotion. The art with which the climax is prepared in the meeting with Sita can never be sufficiently admired. The struggle of Dasharatha between his love of Rama and love of Truth, his anger against Kaikeyi, his despair at the charioteer's return without Rama, the whole contrast between Rama's expected coronation and his banishment, Bharata's renunciation, Guha's attachment to Rama, his suspicion of and indignation against Bharata and his subsequent recognition of his

[1] Chapters.

sublime nature, the rivalry in the heroism of renunciation between Bharata and Rama—all these make the Second Book a superb piece of work.

In the Third Book, the first thirteen years of Rama's life in the forests are passed over very rapidly though not without the poet reminding us of the purpose of Rama's *avatar*. In the fourteenth year, Shurpanakha's passion for Rama unchains the series of incidents that end with the death of Ravana. The fight in which Rama annihilates the fourteen thousand Rakshasas who come to avenge Shurpanakha gives us a foretaste of the magnificent battle-pieces with which Kamban fills his Book of Battles. Ravana's passion for Sita is described in a very extravagant way. Our idea of probability requires that Ravana should have seen Sita at least once before his soul could be fired with a desire to possess her at whatever cost. Tulsi Das has felt this and so he introduces Ravana as one of the suitors to her hand at the *Swayamvara* at her father's court. The extravagance of Kamban's description of Ravana's passion however, faulty as it is, has a meaning, for only such a passion can explain Ravana's persistence in keeping her in spite of the worst defeats and disasters. Rama's going after the golden deer and Sita's fatal obstinacy in sending Lakshmana after Rama are narrated with great skill. Ravana now meets Sita alone in the cottage. The poet expends all his art in the colloquy between the disguised Ravana and Sita, and the bursting of the false form and the revealing of Ravana in his true shape are made to take place exactly at the right moment. The battle of the Vulture-King provides a heroic and touching episode to this book and Ravana carries off Sita without further hindrance. Kamban shows his sense of the fit in not describing at this stage, as Valmiki does, another interview between Sita and Ravana, in Lanka. It is only in the next book that he describes the first meeting of Sita and Ravana after her captivity, and he merely suggests their previous interviews by one sentence put in the mouth of Ravana :

> 'The days are passing one by one away,
> And this is all the kindness thou hast shown
> To me ! [1]

Lakshmana's adventure with Ajomukhi is but a repetition of Rama's with Shurpanakha and is therefore superfluous, but

[1] V iv 26.

Kamban employs it to reveal to us the deep love that Rama has towards Lakshmana. Kabandha closes, as Viradha began, the adventures of Rama and Lakshmana with the Rakshasas in the Forest Book. These three incidents have the same kind of fairy-tale ring about them as the adventures of Ulysses with the Cyclops and Circe have in the *Odyssey*.

The Fourth Book introduces to us new characters in the Vanaras of Kishkindha. The poet exhibits to us the intensity of Rama's desire to avenge his wrongs when he makes him determine the death of Vali the moment he hears from Hanuman that Vali had deprived Sugriva of his wife. The single combat of Vali and Sugriva, Vali's fall, his reproaches against Rama and final acceptance of the justice of his punishment, all these form one of the finest episodes in the poem. The Fourth Book ends with the sending of the Vanara host in all directions in search of Sita.

In the Fifth Book Hanuman, the favourite servant of Rama, discovers Sita. Ravana's interview with Sita, Sita's despair, Hanuman's delivery of Rama's message, his desire to leave a mark in Lanka worthy of his might, his subsequent capture, his release, his setting of Lanka on fire, and his return to Rama crowd this book with a multitude of shifting scenes each flowing from its predecessor as a natural and inevitable consequence.

The *Yuddha Kanda* or the Book of Battles is at least as long as the *Iliad*. The scene opens in Lanka charred by the conflagration started by Hanuman. The Council of the Rakshasas is less interesting than the debate in the Second Book of the *Paradise Lost*, but the episode of Hiranya is magnificent. Vibhishana recites to Ravana the story of the great Asura who was destroyed for his pride, and advises Ravana to avoid a similar fate by sending Sita back to Rama. Ravana, of course, refuses to listen to this advice and war begins. Every battle is a masterpiece, and there is hardly a repetition in the descriptions of such a multitude of battles. The reader will see in subsequent pages that the battle-pieces of Kamban cannot at all suffer by a comparison with Homer's best battles. But battles are not all the contents of the *Yuddha Kanda*. In this book scenes of the deepest pathos alternate with scenes of grand-souled heroism ; despair and hope, and hope and despair weave their light and shade about the heroes and heroines, the terrible and the sublime play about us in all their grandeur. The story gathers fresh force and animation at every step till the death of Ravana. The poet, however, does not stop here but desires to enhance the glory of Sita and bring out into greater prominence the virtue of Bharata. And so, we

have the ordeal of Sita which raises our feelings to a pitch which almost bursts our hearts. Bharata's sensitive heart is next presented to us in his sublime determination to expiate his imagined share in his mother's sin by falling into a fire that he has kindled. And the poem ends sweetly with the coronation of Rama and the happy announcement that all the worlds were contented and in peace.

Now the plot in almost all its details is Valmiki's. But if Kamban takes the situations from Valmiki, he has treated them absolutely in his own way. In the manner of developing the situations, in the gradation by which the climax of each situation is brought about, in the *justesse* which knows how to bring out all its capabilities out of each situation, we feel the touch of the master-artist. In the manner also in which the incidents have been joined together to form the whole, no ordinary skill has been displayed. Every limb of Kamban's story is of course familiar to the student of Valmiki. But on going through the whole poem of Kamban, one is constrained to exclaim, 'here is a building which is built on the same plan no doubt, and with the same materials, but which possesses a striking individuality of its own'.[1]

[1] Further remarks on Kamban's skill in the Architectonics of poetry will be found in the succeeding chapters where the characters are examined and studied in greater detail. *See* especially chapter XI where the episode of Vali is examined closely with special reference to *Architectonics*.

CHAPTER V

THE SUPERNATURAL ELEMENT IN THE RAMAYANA

Every epic has got a supernatural element in it which interlaces itself with the human element in the story, and the action of both these elements in themselves as well as in their interaction form together the warp and the woof of the whole story. Thus we have in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and the *Æneid,* Zeus and Juno, Minerva and Mars, Neptune and Apollo who interfere directly or indirectly with the actions of the several human heroes, Æolus who could unlock the winds and lash the sea into a tempest ; and similar beings endowed with more than human power and strength, and with ability to move from heaven to earth and from earth to heaven with ease. In the *Paradise Lost* Milton introduces Satan and Beelzebub, Raphæl and Abdiel, the Messiah and even God Himself as the chief actors in the story along with Adam and Eve. In his *Les Martyrs* Chateaubriand brings into play Satan and other fallen angels, the Spirit of Jealousy, the Spirit of Vengeance, the good angels and God as some of the protagonists of his story. In a similar manner, all other epic poets have in some way or other made use of the supernatural element in order to give more than ordinary importance to the action which they celebrate in their epics. The taking in of the aid of the supernatural in Epic Poetry has become such a universal habit that even Pope thought his *Rape of the Lock* not dignified enough without the play of this machinery, and so he introduced in his revised edition elves and fairies which certainly add to the interest of the original poem.

In our *Ramayana* also, the supernatural element plays a very important part in the action of the story. But it is, as is natural, of a character different to that of the western epics. It is always difficult to adjust the focus of one's mental vision to the conditions of a world different from that to which it has been previously adjusted ; and it is this difficulty that is to a large extent responsible for most of the criticism that those whose taste is formed on a study of the western epics alone are used to make against eastern epics. We should draw the attention of such critics to the words of Mr. Mark Pattison which he uses in connection with the *Paradise Lost,* but which are capable of being applied with equal

truth to all epic poetry and even broadly speaking to every fine art. He says,

> "The world of the *Paradise Lost* is an ideal, conventional world, quite as much as the world of the *Arabian Nights* or the world of chivalrous romance or that of the pastoral novel. Not only dramatic but all poetry is founded upon illusion. We must, though it be for the moment, suppose it true. We must be transported out of the actual world into that world in which the given scene is laid. It is chiefly the business of the poet to effect this transportation, but the reader (or hearer) must aid. If the reader's imagination is not active enough to assist the poet, he must at least not resist him. When we are once inside the poet's heaven, our critical faculty may justly require that what takes place there is quite consistent with itself, with the laws of the fantastic world. But we may not begin by objecting that it is impossible that such a world should exist. If in any age the power of imagination is enfeebled, the reader becomes more unable to make the effort and he ceases to co-operate with the poet. Much of the criticism of the *Paradise Lost* which we meet with resolves itself to the conditions that the poet demands, a determination to insist that his heaven peopled with deities, dominations, principalities and powers shall have the same material laws which govern our planetary system. It is not, as we often hear it said, that the critical faculty is unduly developed in the nineteenth century. It is that the imaginative faculty fails us ; and when that is the case, criticism is powerless—it has no fundamental assumption upon which its judgments can proceed."

A sympathetic understanding of the nature and conditions of the conventional world postulated by the poet is therefore indispensable to the critic if his criticism should be rational and fruitful. Such an understanding is equally necessary for the simple lover of poetry who desires only æsthetic enjoyment. So, we propose in this chapter to give an account, necessarily brief, of the nature of the supernatural beings that take part in the story and of the miraculous machines of destruction used by them as well as by the human heroes in their battles.

There are mainly two classes of beings which partake of the character of the supernatural in the *Ramayana*. They are the Rakshasas and the Vanaras. We shall take the Rakshasas first. They are beings of enormous power and size, and should be, strictly speaking, labelled as preternatural beings. Ravana has ten heads.

Trishiras has three heads. Some other Rakshasas and Rakshasis have heads of horses, wolves, jackals, lions, etc. By performing great and severe *tapas* (austerities) these Rakshasas have acquired enormous physical strength and many magical powers. They can bend the bow with such force that their arrows can break to pieces the rocks hurled against them by their enemies. They can assume whatever shape they please at their will. They can fly through the air with or without aerial chariots. They hold other worlds than this terrestrial world in subjection under themselves. They can create automatons looking like human beings or Rakshasas. In short they possess all the powers and qualities that are attributed to the gods in the Greek mythology. As a class, the Rakshasas hate virtue and doers of virtue and love a life of vice and luxury. Destruction and humiliation of men and gods are their chief delight.

Besides the ordinary powers and strength of the Rakshasas, Ravana possesses some very extraordinary powers. He is able to lift with his hands the great Mount Kailas with Shiva Himself enthroned upon it. He fights and conquers the *Ashta-dik-gajas*—the eight immense mammoths—elephants which are supposed to bear aloft the universe from its eight sides and corners. The God of Death and Varuna [1] have to acknowledge defeat at his hands. The Sun and the Moon, and Fire and Wind obey his every wish. The very seasons obey him, and come and go at the slightest expression of his will. In short his austerities have earned for him from Shiva and the other gods power and strength only short of omnipotence.

Gods as such do not take an active part in the story. They have been conquered by their enemies, the Rakshasas. Their world, the *Svarga*, is in the hands of Ravana. Their wives and daughters are working as maids to the Rakshasa 'women' in Lanka. They themselves are doing menial service to their Rakshasa masters. Their king Indra is a wanderer away from his kingdom and throne. Even the Supreme Three [2] have been defeated by Ravana and live under a self-denying ordinance, resolving not to interfere with his doings till the strength of his austerities has begun to wane.

But at the command of Vishnu—one of the Supreme Three—who is the one designed in this age to destroy the evil and unrighteous Rakshasas and Asuras, the gods are born as *Vanaras* or giant monkeys on earth. But while they are born on earth,

[1] Rain-God. [2] Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.

they keep also their own divine bodies in *Svarga*, or wherever they are for the moment. The Vanaras are therefore spoken of both as the sons of the respective gods as well as their incarnations. The Vanaras, at least their leaders, have the same preternatural strength and courage as the Rakshasas. They can also assume at will whatever shape they please. They can leap over immense distances of space. Hanuman, the greatest of the Vanaras, can fly across the sea from the mainland to Lanka and fly back. Again he flies to the hill of drugs situated far north of the Himalayas and returns with the hill in his hand in the course of a single night. He can grow as high as the heavens and pervade the world with his body. Angada and Sugriva are almost equal to him in strength but do not possess his pervasive power. The strength of the Vanaras is such that they can tear trees and rocks by the roots and hurl them against their foes. The reader will not be far wrong if he imagines the Vanaras as possessing almost all the strength and powers of the gods of the Greek epics. Only, unlike the latter, they compose the entire army of one of the combatants in the war.

Garuda and Sampati and Jatayus must be classed separately among the supernatural and preternatural beings of the *Ramayana*. Garuda is the great golden eagle, the *Vahan* or carrier of Vishnu. He is the enemy of all serpents and he appears on the battle-field to free Lakshmana and the Vanaras from the serpent noose of Indrajit. At his mere approach all the serpents of the noose either die or slink away. Jatayus and Sampati are vultures—the sons of Aruna, the charioteer of the Sun, and they are the Icarus and Dædalus of Indian story. They had tried to fly up to the very Sun and had fallen down scorched by his fierce rays. Jatayus, the younger, was protected from being burnt by Sampati who shaded him from the sun and had his own wings burned off. At the period of our story, Sampati lives on the Mahendra hill at the southernmost point of the mainland, till the choral repetition of Rama's name makes his wings miraculously to grow. Jatayus is the friend of Dasharatha and so Rama has a tender filial affection for the noble Vulture-King. Jatayus, as the reader will remember, attempts to prevent Ravana from carrying off Sita, but after a terrible struggle falls mortally wounded by Ravana.

These are about all the preternatural beings that take part in the action of the epic. Although Rama and his brothers are divine incarnations, Kamban, like Valmiki, treats their actions as those of mere human heroes, only endowed with some extraordinary powers. For instance, Kamban does not gift Rama

with the pervasive power or enormous size and strength of Hanuman, though everywhere he reminds us that he is the Supreme One who is immanent in everything and who transcends even the Three Persons of the Trinity. In fact, Rama and his brothers are human in their actions and their physical condition, though they are divine in their ultimate nature.

But if Rama and Lakshmana are merely men in their actions, they possess the power to command the gods to do their bidding even as Ravana and the Rakshasa leaders have. We speak of their power to convert their arrows by means of *mantras* or spells into weapons possessing the power of *Agni* and *Vayu*,[1] Shiva and Vishnu and Brahma, and other deities. Arrows thus impregnated by spells are called *Astras*. It is these *astras* that deserve to be called machinery, a term which western critics are used to apply to the supernatural beings etc., that influence the action in the *Iliad* and other epics.

The *astra* should be imagined by the reader to be an arrow which the spell, pronounced by the bowman at the time of aiming it, converts into a weapon possessing preternatural power, generally the power of a god. Thus the *Agneya-astra* must be supposed to be an arrow which the spell of the archer impregnates with the *Shakti* or force of *Agni*, the God of Fire. Such an arrow must be imagined to fly against the enemy carrying living fire in its bosom and burning down everything before it. Similarly the *Varuna-astra* would be the weapon possessing the force of Varuna, the God of the Ocean, and hence would be aimed against the *Agneya-astra* whose fire it would extinguish. The *Maheshvara-astra* would be an arrow filled with the force of God Shiva or Maheshvara, the *Narayana-astra* would be an arrow filled with the force of God Narayana or Vishnu, and the *Brahmastra* would be a dart filled with the force of Brahma, and so on. The *Naga-pasha* or the serpent-noose must be imagined to be an arrow or a succession of arrows which the appropriate spells convert into deadly serpents which bind themselves round the bodies of the enemies and strangle them. Kamban speaks also of the *Maya-astra* which creates any illusion that the sender pleases before the eyes of the opponent. In rare cases, incantations are supposed to be pronounced upon other weapons than arrows, and then these weapons,—sometimes even a blade of grass serves as a weapon to the expert in the science of *astras*—become the appropriate *astras*.

[1] **Fire and Wind.**

The reader will observe that when an *astra* is aimed against an archer, his obvious defence according to this convention would be to send against it an *astra* of superior power which would conquer or neutralise it. Thus arrows would wrestle against arrows in mid-air, each armed with the force given to it by the respective archers.

Out of all these *astras,* the *Brahmastra* is supposed to be the most powerful, though in one or two places Kamban speaks of the *Narayana-astra* and *Maheshvara-astra* as equally or even more powerful weapons. These *astras* are to be supposed to rush through the air with fatal force, giving birth, both on their way as well as when they strike the enemy, to innumerable destructive machines and even beings such as cobras, demons, etc. The torpedoes and shrapnels, and flame-throwers and poison-gas shells and similar destructive weapons so abundantly used in the late war are the analogues of the *astras* of the *Ramayana.* And who knows if the first ideas of some of the terrific weapons of modern times were not put into the heads of their European inventors by the description of the several *astras* mentioned in the Ramayana!

Rama and Lakshmana on the one side and the great leaders of the Rakshasas on the other are described by the poet as great experts in the science of *astras.* Rama's arrows have another peculiarity in that they come back to his quiver after doing the destruction for which they were sent.

Although the gods do not take part in the action of the story except through the *astras,* they make their appearance sometimes in their own persons in the course of the action. Thus, when Bharata persists in inviting Rama to come back to Ayodhya, the Devas who are standing around unseen by the assembled people pronounce a command, which is heard as a disembodied voice, that he should himself go back and rule the kingdom for fourteen years. Again Rama and Lakshmana see Indra approach Sharabhanga in order to offer him residence in his own heaven. Matali, the charioteer of Indra, is ordered by the gods to drive Rama in the heavenly *vimana* or air chariot of Indra during the final battle with Ravana. And finally the gods and the deceased Dasharatha come down on earth at the time when Sita falls into the fire and advise Rama to take her back to himself.

We believe we have now placed before the reader all that is necessary for a proper understanding of the conventional world in which the action of the *Ramayana* unfolds itself. Now we shall take up the study of the more important characters of our story and see how Kamban treats them in his epic.

CHAPTER VI

RAMA

In the delineation of character, Kamban stands on a level with the greatest poets of the world. The lines are drawn with a firm hand, and the characters are painted with such accuracy and fullness that from any single sentence, and sometimes even from a single phrase in a speech, one can tell the person speaking without any the least doubt.

Here too, naturally, Valmiki has set the stamp on the characters of the *Ramayana*. But in Kamban's hand they have become much more grand. The student of Valmiki will wonder how his Rama and Bharata, Ravana and Kumbhakarna, Vali and Hanuman, Sita and Kausalya and the rest could be improved. The fact, however, is there that Kamban's heroes and heroines are beings of a decidedly higher stature than those of Valmiki.

The idealisation of Rama is not solely or chiefly the work of Kamban. The fact is that the Rama of Valmiki has so captivated the heart of Hindusthan that the whole nation has expended on him all the love and devotion of which its rich nature was capable. The Tamil Alwars, and especially Kulasekhara the Chera Prince, have given literary expression in their devotional verses to the popular pronouncement that Rama is the Supreme Narayana Himself in human form. In Kamban's time, therefore, the ideal man had grown into very God, the mere repetition of whose name with devotion would lead unto heaven. What Kamban has done is to give the impress of the master-artist to the character that had grown into its fullness and grandeur by the devotion-filled meditation of generations of the sons of India.

This, however, was no ordinary task. It is easy to pile epithets upon epithets and constantly repeat that Rama was a divine king. But to create the poetical impression of the divinity of Rama's character and to maintain the epic in all places at the level that will alone harmonise with such an impression is a vastly different thing. And Kamban has eminently succeeded in this extremely difficult task.

With regard to the other characters, and especially with regard to the Rakshasas, the heightening of the colour is mainly Kamban's work. With the instinct of the born artist, Kamban must have seen that the idealisation of Rama alone without

raising the other personages of the story to a similar height of character would not produce a harmonic whole. And so he has made his Ravana and Indrajit, Sugriva and Angada, Kausalya and Mandodari much grander characters than they appear in Valmiki's poem. And although Valmiki's Bharata is one of the finest creations of poetry, the little touches that Kamban has given to the figure have rendered Bharata's virtue even more resplendent than in the original *Ramayana*.

With these preliminary observations, we shall examine more closely the characters of Kamban's *Ramayana*, giving greater attention to the more prominent characters therein.

Rama, of course, will claim our first attention. In three or four places Valmiki has deified Rama. Even these passages, however, modern critics regard as interpolations. But, howsoever this may be, everywhere else in Valmiki, Rama is only the valorous prince, perfect in virtue, but nothing more than a simple mortal man. In Kamban, however, it is rare to meet with any reference to Rama which does not indicate his divinity. He is the Supreme Lord, he is Narayana, he is the one that sleeps the sleep of wakefulness in the Ocean of Milk, he is the Great One whom even the Vedas have not seen. If he runs after the golden deer, 'he sets forward the foot that measured the three worlds'. If Rama and Sita love each other at first sight, 'is it not the meeting again of those that were together in the Ocean of Milk, and were separated only for a while?' It is the same from beginning to end. But this constant deification of Rama does not stand in the way of the most human emotions being attributed to him. He feels all the anguish of separation from Sita. He is stunned on hearing of the death of his father. He is affected by the simple affection of Guha and the self-reproach of Bharata. He weeps at the fall of Lakshmana in one of his encounters with Indrajit, and is beside himself with grief at the report that Indrajit had murdered Sita. And yet we do not feel that there is anything unnatural in Rama's human acts and emotions. There is the same mingled divinity and humanity about Kamban's Rama as about the Christ of the *Gospels* and of the *Paradise Regained*.

The fascination which the character of Rama has exercised upon the mind of Hindusthan is a measure of the great art with which our poet, among others, has delineated him. Rarely has literature anywhere taken upon itself the task of creating such valour and such virtue. And still more rarely has it risen to the level of such a creation.

And what a character is that of Rama! All the qualities

that belong to the hero are to be found in him to perfection. He is the very personification of valour. He is not elated even when the imperial crown is offered to him. Valmiki's Rama announces to his mother the fact of his prospective coronation with just a touch of joy. And to Lakshmana he says with greater expansiveness,

> '*Rule thou this kingdom with me, O Lakshmana. This fortune is for thee too who art my other self. Life and the crown I desire for thy sake more than for myself.*'

But Kamban takes care not to put even these words into the mouth of Rama. He says,

> 'When Dasharatha had finished, the Lotus-eyed One was not elated, neither despised he the gift. But, feeling that it was his duty to obey his father's commands, he consented!'[1]

After this, Kamban does not allow Rama to speak a word in the poem till he makes his grand reply to Kaikeyi.[2] By this, Rama is made to appear more stoic than in Valmiki. The poet, as the reader is aware, draws pointed attention to this stoicism at this place. And he calls it again to our mind when he describes Sita's thoughts while she is a captive in Lanka. She would think, he says,

> 'On that face, which, both when asked by his father to accept the imperial crown as well as when commanded by his mother to leave all and live a forest life, like the pictorial lotus was ever the same!'[3]

Another effect of this stoical calmness is that Rama not only does not himself accuse Kaikeyi anywhere, but deprecates others accusing her. When Lakshmana rages against her on hearing of Rama's exile for the first time, Rama calms him saying,

> 'They blame not streams if water sometimes fails; blame thou not then our king, nor her our mother: 'Tis fate that drives us on, my brother! Why then this rage?'[4]

A fine sidelight is thrown on this trait in Rama's character when the poet makes Bharata say to his mother, when she announced to him that she had exiled Rama for his sake,

> 'Thou livest yet! And still my spell-bound hand
> Leapeth not forth to finish thee! Did not
> I fear that Ram, my sovereign, would resent
> The deed, shall ev'n the name of mother stay
> My arm from slaying thee?'[5]

[1] II i 70. [2] *See* p. 9. [3] V iii 20.
[4] II iv 134. [5] II ix 72.

Note here how the poet raises Rama in our estimation by making Bharata say that Rama would never tolerate the slaying of Kaikeyi even for her triple crime.

But it is not only that Rama forgives Kaikeyi her evil. He retains his former love for her even in his exile. For among the many things that Sita wants Hanuman to remind Rama about, she says,

> " And when I had a parrot fair I loved,
> I asked my lord what name he liked to give
> To her. And he with tenderness replied,
> 'Give her my virtuous mother Kaikey's name.' " [1]

If Rama, however, is a *vairagi*[2], when it is a question of his own personal fortunes, he is tender as a woman when he sees others suffer. Thus when he sees Lakshmana's princely hands engaged in building a cottage for him in the forests, he exclaims to himself thus :

> 'The flower-like tender feet of Janaka's child [3]
> Are strong enough to tread the jungle paths ;
> And Lakshman's hands are skilled to build for us
> A tasteful cottage home. Ah, those whom Fate
> Has helpless cast upon the world, what's there
> That they'll not learn to do !' [4]

The poet again touches on this side of Rama's nature when he makes Sita recall to mind while in the Ashoka grove in Lanka,

> The pain of Rama when he saw his brother [5]
> Wear not the crown upon his head, but wear
> The dusty twisted knot of hair. [6]

The grief of Rama at the fall of Lakshmana, in one of Indrajit's battles, is pitched in a higher key :

> Now he would plough the ground with his limbs ; now he would heave heavy sighs ; now he would swoon away as in death ; soon coming to himself he would act as one who knew not what he was doing ; suddenly he would cry aloud,

1 V vi 83. 2 Stoic. 3 Sita. 4 II viii 52.

5 Bharata, when he came to forest to invite Rama to take back the Crown that Kaikeyi had deprived him of.

6 V iii 25.

'Lakshmana, O Lakshmana!' Then he would place his hands under Lakshmana's nostrils, and call out, 'Livest thou, my child?'

Again he would gently press Lakshmana's feet with his lotus hands; he would pat his thighs; he would look intently into his lotus eyes, fair like fresh-gathered flowers; he would listen at his heart to see if it was yet beating; he would look at the heavens; he would lift up his body and place it against his heart; then he would lay it down upon the ground; suddenly he would exclaim, 'Is the foe fled away?'

He would look at his bow and then at the deadly noose thrown by the enemy; he would look at the night that appeared as if it would never end; he would look at the gods that were crowding in the heavens; he would want to tear the earth itself up by its roots.

He would cast his eyes on the heroes assembled round; he would think of the fate that had brought about this misfortune; once again he would look at his powerful bow and then at his arrows; and then he would cry aloud, 'Has ever man suffered like me?'[1]

We shall close the study of this phase of Rama's character with one more extract. Seeing that it was difficult to overcome his enemy by pure force of arms, Indrajit wanted to destroy their *morale* and so he created an automaton resembling Sita, breathed life into it by his magic art, cut off its head in the presence of Hanuman, and flew away upon his aerial chariot saying that he was going to invade Ayodhya. When Hanuman brought this news to Rama, Rama's grief knew no bounds, and he swooned away. At length, rising from his trance, Rama spoke these words:

'It seems my curse ends not with Sita ev'n:
Needs must it swallow up my race; nor know
I now whom else it will destroy. O Lord!
Is there an end to this? and then, my brothers,
Will they be spared? In his aerial car
Faster than thought, the foe towards Ayodh
Has flown, and is returned. The home that gave
Me life, is shattered now, while Sita here
Has fallen under the murderer's knife! What else
Is coming, I know not, nor welcome death
I find!'[2]

[1] VI xviii 222-225. [2] VI xxv 78, 79.

This capacity for poignant suffering is but the obverse of Rama's naturally affectionate disposition. The poet does not forget to point out that even as a child Rama had kind words and sweet looks for the veriest strangers. When Vasishtha approves of Rama's coronation, he says,

> ''Tis little if I say he loved all men
> Ev'n as he loves himself : the love he bears
> To thee, ev'n that's the measure of his love
> To all things living.'[1]

When the rough forest king Guha comes to see him on the banks of the Ganga, Rama is so moved by his love for himself that he begins to love him as if he were a blood-brother. And so when Guha desires to accompany him southward and serve him all the fourteen years of his exile, he addresses to him these feeling words :

> 'Thou art dear to me as life : and this my brother
> Is brother to thee as well, and this fair one
> Is kin to thee ; and all the sea-girt earth
> Is thine of right whilst I adventure on,
> *Thy* duties doing. Happiness comes to us
> Alone in the wake of misery. Grieve not
> Therefore that now we part : we were but four
> Before : to-day with thee we're brothers five
> Attached one t'another with loving bonds.
> Lakshman, thy brother, is here to suffer all
> For me . . . . .
> Thy other brother Bharat is there to guard
> Our kindred in the north ; now tell me who
> But thee can guard our kindred here ? Thy men,
> Are not they mine ? Then stay thou here and watch
> O'er them till I return.'[2]

Such was the depth of Rama's affection for Guha that Sita in her lonely stay at the Ashoka grove would go into raptures when she remembered,

> how Rama said to Guha, humble forester as he was,
> 'Lakshmana is thy own brother, and Sita here is brother's wife to thee !'

Two others Rama loved with the same kind of brotherly

[1] II i 38.

[2] II vi 68-71.

affection—Sugriva, whom he swore to avenge as soon as he heard that his elder brother Vali was hounding him, and Vibhishana, who was disgusted at the conduct of his own brother Ravana in refusing to send back Sita, and who had come to Rama as a refugee from Lanka. So, when he crowns Vibhishana as King of Lanka, he tells him,

> 'When Guha joined us on Ganga's banks,
> I counted myself blessed with brothers four :
> Sugriv to me a fifth did add ; and now
> With thee we are become sev'n loving brothers.
> Blest verily is father Dasharath :
> One son he banished to the forests wild,
> But sons on sons do grow on him, and bless
> His royal name.'[1]

Towards Bharata and Lakshmana and Hanuman, Rama's affection grows into a tenderer plant. We have referred to Rama's grief at seeing Bharata coming to the Chitrakuta hill clad in hermit's weeds. He has few occasions to exhibit his love for him in the course of his wanderings in the forest and the war with the Rakshasas. But Bharata is never absent from his heart even for a single moment. And the memory of his sublime nature was one of the most dearly prized companions of his lonely thoughts. For when he sends a message through Sumantra to Ayodhya from the threshold of the jungle country, he asks him to request Vasishtha on his behalf to console Bharata in his grief when he should hear of his exile, and asks him also to tell Bharata not to be angry with his mother for having brought about his banishment. When Lakshmana, seeing Bharata approach towards where Rama was on the Chitrakuta hill, charges him with desiring to kill Rama, Rama expostulates with him and says,

> 'It is thy love to me, brother, that makes thee blind to Bharata's virtues. I regard the Vedas themselves as no more than commentaries on Bharata's life. Is it the part of wisdom not to see that it is his love for me that draws him here and that he must be coming here to offer me the crown ? . . . . Can'st thou suspect thus our Bharata, the touchstone of honour, the very God of supreme Virtue ?'[2]

How near Bharata was to Rama's heart is shown in a more pointed manner by the poet when he describes the single combat

[1] VI iv 146.   [2] II xii 44, 45.

of Vali and Sugriva. As Sugriva and Vali were wrestling with each other, Lakshmana spoke to Rama condemning the conduct of Sugriva in having invited him to kill his own brother. But Rama said,

> . . . . 'If all
> Were 'like in their devotion to their brothers,
> How can my Bharata be placed the first
> I' th' list of loyal brothers ?'[1]

The reader will not fail to notice the veiled blow aimed at Lakshmana himself[2] who must have been proud, and not without reason, of his unwavering loyalty to his brother Rama. This veiled cut at Lakshmana by praising Bharata is suggested by Valmiki himself, but he introduces that sentiment at the time when Rama is consulting his council as to whether they should admit Vibhishana into their camp as an ally. And Valmiki makes Rama say there—and Rama is addressing both Sugriva and Lakshmana at the time—,

> '*Not all brothers, child, are like Bharata,*
> *nor all sons like myself !*'

This snub is more cruel being administered in the presence of others—though friends—while the self-praise takes away something from the character of Rama. The situation that Kamban has chosen for the expression of the sentiment, and the suppression of the self-praise show him once again the grand connoisseur as well as artist that he is.

But the superior praise given by Rama to Bharata does not mean that he loves Lakshmana less. In fact, how could he love anybody more than his inseparable companion who had left all and was suffering all for his sake ? We have referred to Rama's feelings when he saw Lakshmana building him his cottage and also when Lakshmana was brought down by the *Naga-pasha* of Indrajit. We may say that Rama regarded him as his own child. For did not Sumitra tell Lakshmana in his own presence that he should look upon Rama as a father ? And was not Lakshmana doing him every service that a son does to his father ?

[1] IV v 34.

[2] For if Lakshmana suffered all for Rama, was he not unkind to his other brother Bharata ?

And so Rama heaps on him all his tenderest epithets—but almost always in his absence. Thus when he finds that what Lakshmana had forewarned him of had come true, namely, that the golden deer was not really a deer but a Rakshasa in disguise, he exclaims to himself,

> 'Ah, wise, verily wise is my dear child, the life of my life, the soul of my very soul!'

So also when Lakshmana was way-laid by Ajomukhi and did not come back in time, Rama went out in search of him in the forest and gave vent to his love and anxiety for him in these words :

> 'Still he is not come back, the dearest part
> Of my life. Alas, has he sunk 'neath the load
> Of my great grief? Eyes have I none but him
> To lead me on in this dark wood. How then
> Can I with bleeding heart the jungle scan
> And find out if he lives? O Lakshmana!
> My only staff in life! hast thou the heart
> To hide thy face from me? Hear'st thou, my child?
> Hard verily is thy heart!
> 'Sit just to make me roam in search of *thee*
> As well, my fearless lion, who left thy all
> And followed *me*?'[1]

We shall give one final extract from our poet to illustrate Rama's affection for Lakshmana. When Lakshmana went to fight his last battle with Indrajit, Rama did not accompany him but remained in the camp awaiting the result. And this is how Kamban describes his feelings during Lakshmana's absence :

> He waited on with an anxious, tortured heart,
> To himself oft repeating, 'sure, he will
> Conquer the guileful Rakshasa,' and praying
> 'May Dharma be an armour to my brother!'
> . . . . . . And keeping e'er his eyes fixed on the way
> His brother would come, ev'n as good Bharata
> In hermit's robes with many a prayer was
> Awaiting him, at length he saw the march
> Triumphal of his brother towards the camp.[2]

[1] III ix 63, 67, 68, 71.

[2] VI xxvii 64.

The sight drew tears from Rama's eyes. And this is how the poet comments upon it :

The tears that flowed from Rama's lotus eyes
When he his brother's form descried, were they
The liquid stream of love ? or were they tears
Induced by painful memories of the past ?
Or were they tears of joy ? Or were they but
The tokens of His mercy infinite ? [1]

The affection of Rama to Hanuman is the affection of a great *Guru* to a great disciple. He honours the learning and wisdom and physical strength of the great Vanara. But this respect is warmed by personal affection which arose at the very first sight of him, and grew stronger by every day that passed. It is to him that Rama entrusts his signet ring and his most intimate message to Sita, at the time that he sends the Vanara host in search of her. It is to him that he entrusts the ring once again, this time in order to prevent Bharata from falling into the fire. It is him that he keeps by his side as his constant companion and friend, and it is on his joyfully offered shoulders that he rides during his great battles with the Rakshasas.

If we say that Rama was all affection for Guha, Sugriva and Vibhishana, and that he loved Hanuman, Lakshmana and Bharata, how shall we describe his love for the beautiful, the holy, the all-suffering Sita ? It was an all-absorbing love, was his love for his incomparable spouse. The great composer of South India, Thiyagayya, says that Rama's love for Sita was as unique as his loyalty to his pledged word and his skill in archery.[2] That love adds new nerve to his lion-like strength at Janaka's court, because,

The massive bow that like the Meru hill
Before him lay, he lightly lifted up
As if it were the wedding garland bright
For his beloved ! [3]

That love makes him distractedly apostrophise the moon and Manmatha [4] on the night previous to the *Svayamvara* of Sita. And that same intense love makes him rave like a

[1] VI xxvii 65.

[2] *Oka mata, oka banamu, oka patni!* One his word, one his arrow's aim, and one his beloved spouse.

[3] I xii 33.

[4] The God of Love.

mad man when he loses her, and fall down like a lightning-struck *sal* tree when he hears that she has just been murdered by Indrajit.

Kamban does not describe any entrancing love scenes between Rama and Sita. He makes them first speak to each other only when Rama desires to take leave of Sita at the time of starting for the forest. There is a world of suggestion in their words of their happy domestic life, and it is generally by suggestion that Kamban speaks of the ineffable love that they bear towards each other. Thus while walking towards the country watered by the Ganga, Rama and Sita enjoy in each other's company the delightful sights of rural nature. They see the swans sporting with each other in the distance. Sita sees her lord's feet mock the lotuses in freshness of colour and beauty of shape. The blue lotus luxuriantly growing in the brooks puts Rama in mind of the soft eyes of his beloved Sita. The lake banks where sleep the royal swans, the sand dunes in the open country, the groves full of young trees and smiling flowers, and the great Ganga herself delight their hearts and add romance to their ever deepening love. They bathe together in the holy Ganga. They enjoy together the wild beauties of the forest, and it is there that Rama's words become more and more tender towards Sita. She is Arundhati[1] to him and sweeter than ambrosia. She is his unpaintable beauty. She is to him the *amrit* that rose at the churning of the Milk Ocean. She is the sweet-singing *koil* bird fairer than the dancing peacock. She is his light, and the life of womanhood itself. She is the fair one that could teach virtue to Arundhati's self. She is the one the very thought of whom is ambrosia to him.

Rama's passionate love for Sita appears most when, at the time of giving his final instructions to Hanuman just before the Vanaras were sent all over the earth to search for Sita, he dwells with delight upon the beauty of her form, and calls to mind the little telling incidents of their married and pre-marriage days. Thus he tells Hanuman,

> "Even the lotus has its petals pale;
> The moon has got its spot, and where is form
> Of any kind without the slightest fault ?
> But thou wilt see no imperfection mar
> Her shapely form. Great Brahma made the flute

[1] The wife of Vashistha held up to all womankind as the ideal of wifely virtues and womanly chastity.

And *vina,* parrots, *koils,* and children's babble,
And then he coped all sweetness with her voice :
But nought could he create to parallel
Her speech and tone ; and can he e'er succeed
If he should try ev'n now for all his life ?
Though earth and heaven should search to find its like
What can approach *amrit*[1] in taste ? And what
Can e'er compare with the sweetness of her speech ?
Thou think'st of honey and *amrit* : but can
They e'er delight the ear ?
Remind her that our eyes did first commingle
When I a stranger came to Mith'la town,
The while she stood beside the dovecot fair
In her virgin bower. Recall again to her
How I beheld her form, like a lightning young,
And full of grace, at Jan'ka's palace hall.
Tell her I call to mind her great resolve,
When I the bow of Shiva broke in two,
To end herself if I should other prove
Than whom she saw with holy Kaushika.
Recall to her my words, when she resolved
To follow me to wilds unseen before :
I said, 'O Sita, thou wert a fount of joy
To me till now : but now thou wilt become
The source of griefs innumerable if thou
Persist in thy desire.' And she replied
With tears in her eyes, 'when thou dost leave
Thy crown, and take thyself to forest life,
O love, is everything supportable
By thee excepting only me ?' And last
Remind her how, when we had barely passed
The gates of Oudh, she stopped and asked, 'Where is
The forest boundless in expanse ? Are we
Arrived in it ?' "[2]

How deep, how tender, how loyal must be the love that could treasure up in its heart, and dwell with intense delight upon such incidents as these ?

So when, with the aid of her magical powers, Shurpanakha takes the shape of a woman of entrancing beauty and approaches

1 The immortal drink of the gods.

2 IV x 60, 62, 63, 67-72.

him with lustful intentions, Rama merely exclaims, 'where is the limit to beauty of shape ?', but his heart is absolutely untouched. As the meeting with Shurpanakha brings into prominence the unshakeable loyalty of Rama's love for Sita, we translate the scene and give it below almost in extenso :

> And the daughter of duplicity approached, full of sweet speech, her feet shapely and soft as the fresh red lotus and leaf-buds, her appearance recalling to mind the tender creeper and the swan and the young peacock.
>
> The Goddess of the golden lotus herself would yield to her in beauty ; her face gleamed with the light of her lance-like eyes ; and she was like lightning descending from the skies.
>
> Her form had the grace of the *Kalpaka* creeper ; her words breathed tenderness and love ; she walked on like a gay peacock, but her eyes she took from the young fawn.
>
> Her anklets and her belt-bells, her gold garlands and the bees buzzing about the flowers in her hair, announced that a fair one was approaching, and Rama turned his eyes in that direction.
>
> She came like softest ambrosia which the Devas were delighted to offer and with her waist a little bent under the weight of her superb bust, and He who in His mercy openeth the eyes of wisdom to His devotees [1] now saw her before his eyes.
>
> He saw that melting form, the like of which was not to be found in *Svarga* or the earth or the world beneath, and thought within himself, 'Who can confine the Spirit of Beauty ? Where is the limit to beauty of shape ?'
>
> And she that was full of desire put into her expression all the charm she could command, joined her hands together in salute, lightly brandished the lances of her fascinating eyes, and softly stepped aside like a young fawn. [2]

After preliminary inquiries, in reply to which she says that she is the sister of Kubera and Ravana, Rama asks her what she wants of him, and then the colloquy continues thus :

> 'It's hard for fair ones nobly born to speak
> The love that burns their hearts : alas for me,
> My life doth ebb away and there is none
> To help me here. What can I in this plight,

[1] Rama

[2] III v 31-37.

Save speak to thee in boldness all I feel ?
I pray thee, save me from the cruel darts
That Manmath aims at me!' Thus boldly she
Her bad and lust-filled heart laid bare, the while
Her lightning glances did her tale confirm,
Whereat Kausalya's son thought in his heart,
'No shame has she, and evil is her mind.'
She did not see his thoughts, and once again
Began : 'I knew not until now that thou
Wert here : and so my time and youth were lost
In service done to hermits deemed wise.'
Quoth Ram, 'The Shastras do such unions
Condemn as thou desirest : for thou com'st
Of Brahman stock, and I am Kshatriya born.'
'If this is all thou urg'st,' said Shurp'nakha
'I die not yet ; for though my father was
Brahman, mother was a Rakshas queen.'
He heard the lustful Rakshasi : the shade
Of a budding smile suffused his lotus lips
While thus he spoke : 'The wise declare that men
Should not damsel wed of Rakshas birth.'
'What fool I was to say,' thought Shurp'nakha,
'That I was Ravana's sister!' Then aloud
Quoth she, 'As fruit of great austerities
I have my shameful Rakshas birth cast off,
And God has blessed me with this comely form.'
To her, thus He whom Vedas themselves find
For e'er to be beyond their utmost depth :
'If thou art sister to the sovereign,
As thou dost say, of all the worlds, and if
Thy other brother is Kuber, afraid
Am I to marry thee unless they give
Thee 'way in solemn form!' 'But know'st not thou,'
Persisted she, '*Gandharva* rites are fixed
For those like us whom mutual love has joined ?
When thus our love is sanctified, my brothers
Will gladly welcome thee. Now they make war
On holy men ; and full of sin and rage
Are they ; unaided thou shouldst not approach
To where they are. When I shall make thee king
Of earth and heaven, then will they come and serve
And clasp thy lotus feet.' Ram laughed aloud,
And said, 'with thee as wife, and Rakshas hosts

As friends, with all the endless wealth that comes
To me with thee, am I not blest indeed ?' [1]

Although she saw that Rama was mocking at her, she did not give up hope. And so, as Sita approached Rama just at the moment, she thought that she might be just another woman like herself who was come to Rama with intentions similar to her own, and she warned him against her saying that she, Sita, was a man-eating Rakshasi disguised. But when Sita nestled herself in Rama's breast for fear of herself, and when Rama bid her go away and went into his cottage accompanied by Sita who was still clinging to him,

She was like one struck dumb, her life was fled.
Her breath stopped short, nor knew she where she was
Or what she thought. But jealous thoughts soon rose
And agitated once again her breast.
And then she slowly said within herself,
Deep verily is his love for her ! [2]

That was Rama's love for Sita, a deep abiding love, which charms, the most fascinating, could not for a moment alter.

It was his excessive love for her that made him disregard Lakshmana's warning and go after the golden deer himself, and thus sow the seed of endless misery to himself as well as to Sita. For when Lakshmana offered, as the best of a bad bargain, to hunt the deer and bring it himself,

Pouting her ambrosia-dropping ruby lips,
Like a sweet-tongued parrot young she lisped, ' Then, thou
Wouldst not thyself pursue and capture him
For me ? ', and left him with tears flowing down
Her cheeks. But Rama could not bear to see
Her in a pet, and said, ' My golden love,
Behold I myself go and I shall bring
Him in a trice.' [3]

So saying he asked Lakshmana to guard Sita in his absence and hurried after the golden deer.

[1] III v 45-56.
[2] III v 70. Aiyer follows a different reading of the 3rd line of the original poem.
[3] III vii 237, 238.

Again when he returned from his fruitless hunt and found not Sita, he was

> like the soul that had left the body for a while and returning on its way finds it not in its place and mourns its loss. He was like one whose all was swallowed up by the earth and who had nothing else to call his own.[1]

The depth of Rama's love is again described by Hanuman to Sita at the Ashoka grove when he tells her how Rama was grieving for her. One stanza must suffice for us. He says,

> 'I bless thee, mother, for I have found out at last the secret spring of Rama's life. Thou hast not quitted his heart and that is why he liveth yet. And where hath he a life to part with, when thou his life art here?'[2]

It is this same intense love that makes Rama's heart thrill at the sight of the jewel that Sita sends him through Hanuman. Says the poet,

> He was like a man changed. When the jewel was placed in his hands, his feelings were even as on the day when first before the holy fire he clasped her hand.
>
> His hair stood on end; tears flowed freely from his eyes; there was a tremor in his arms and chest; sweat drops suffused his whole body; he breathed heavily; his body swelled with joy. Oh, who can tell all that passed in his heart?[3]

There is a blot in Rama's love, but of that we shall speak when we come to Sita. Now we shall close the study of Rama's character with an examination of his valour, his magnanimity, and his loyalty to his pledged word.

Rama is the ideal hero of India. The great poet Bana gave the drama of Rama's life that he wrote, the name of *Mahaviracharitra*—the life of the Great Hero. Shri Krishna, when he is describing his own glories as the Supreme One in the tenth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*, gives Rama the first place among warriors. He says, "*Rāmah shastra bhrtām aham*"—among those skilled in the handling of weapons of war know me to be Rama. And Kamban's description of Rama's valour and exploits rises fully to the height of such a grand conception.

Indeed, in a way, the whole story of Rama's life in our epic is a story of heroic deeds and valiant fights. Even while he was very young, the fame of his strength had spread far and wide, and the Rishi Vishvamitra chose him, of all princes and heroes,

1 III viii 158. 2 V v 77. 3 V xv 82, 83.

as the protector of his *Yajna-bhumi.*[1] And great warrior that he himself was in the days of his worldly life, Vishvamitra, supplemented the military training of Rama and Lakshmana during their sojourn with him, with his own special teaching.

Rama's skill in archery and the strength of his arm are admired by the poet at every step. Tadaka's adamantine body is pierced by one dart sped from his mighty bow. Vishvamitra cannot speak too highly or too often of his strength and skill. When Ahalya is freed from her curse by the touch of the dust fallen from his feet, Vishvamitra tells him her story and at the end of it burst out with the following words :

> 'And e'en the sin of Gautam's wife has been
> Ordained for good : therein I see a hope
> For the suffering world. For in the marvellous fight
> With Tadaka I saw the strength of thine arm,
> And here I see the virtue of thy feet!'[2]

Again at Janaka's Court, while introducing Rama, Vishvamitra must needs sing the praises of Rama's valour in three verses :

> 'Note thou, my lord, the strength of the beautifully long and muscular arms of this manly boy, who is dark even as the ocean with its incessant roaring breakers : it was but one arrow of his, but it pierced the heart of Tadaka of the flaming eyes, and after piercing her heart tore through the rocks, and the trees, and the solid earth itself.
>
> 'Endless were the heads of the Rakshasas that fell that day and were piled one over another like hills on hills. One arrow of his sent one of the Rakshasi's sons to the other world : I know not what became of her other son ; but thou seest that my *yajna* is completed and I am here.
>
> 'Again, O king, behold the weapons which I taught him to use—weapons that Brahma himself will not find it easy to handle. Think of it, even I who taught him their use, am astonished at the way that they obey his will and arm.'[3]

Kamban generally takes care that Rama does not boast about his prowess himself. But there are occasions when Rama cannot but speak of his strength and power himself. For instance, when he hears from Jatayus' lips that Ravana has carried away Sita, he bursts out into a terrible wrath and threatens the whole world with destruction. Kamban describes his wrath in these words :

[1] Sacrificial ground. [2] I ix 82. [3] I xi 26-28.

He scarce had spoke when rushed the blood at once
To Rama's eyes ; a storm was in his breath ;
A frown settled on his manly brow ; the spheres
In terror shook ; the stars their orbits fled ! . . . .
The worlds lay crouching lest his sudden wrath
Should burst on them ; when with a smile that meant
Destruction dire, he thus addressed the bird :[1]
'Behold the world on its stable axis moves
And gods unmoved look on, while in their sight
A Rakshas carries off a helpless dame,
And thou art mangled thus in her defence !
I will destroy them all in one single ruin.
The stars shall scattering fall ! The sun shall burst !
The void of heaven shall shimmer with the light
Of burning spheres ! And water, air, and fire
And all that lives and moves shall soon dissolve
To their embryon atoms ! And my wrath shall end
The gods themselves in heaven. And thou wilt see
The circling universe and all that lies
Beyond, burst like a bubble in the stream !'[2]

When, after the rainy season is over, Sugriva does not bring his Vanara host according to his stipulation in order to begin the search for Sita, Rama sends Lakshmana to Kishkinda, the capital of Sugriva, with the following threat :

'Tell him,' said Rama, 'that the bow which We
Have bent to 'stablish Righteousness, and end
All evil ones, unbroken yet doth rest
In Our hands ; and let him know that Yam[3] has not
Yet ceased to work, nor We to handle darts ![4]

When Ravana's spies are caught and are brought before him, he bids them tell Ravana that he would destroy him, even if Rudra and Vishnu and all that live in all the worlds come and help him, and that he would pacify the spirit of Jatayus by sacrificing to it in the blood of his adversary.

When at the close of the first day's battle Ravana's bows and chariots are destroyed, and he stands alone, unarmed, with all his army annihilated, Rama addresses him some stinging words

1 Jatayus.
2 III viii 201, 203-206.
3 Yama is the God of Death.
4 IV viii 4.

wherein he speaks of his own prowess. Here are some of his words :

'Know thou the gods themselves with all their might
Win not if unjust is their cause. Thou hadst
This very day been dead, did not I stay
My arm for pity sake, because thou stand'st
Helpless, alone, upon the field. If canst,
To-morrow bring the flower of thy troops,
Or seek in flight precarious safety. Listen!
If thou send Sita back, and *Svarga's* throne
Restore to Indra, and Vibhishan crown
As Lanka's king, thyself his will obeying,
Then I my deadly arrows shall withhold.
But if, perverse, in thy evil thou persist,
Bring all thy strength and face me on the field.
Thy evil soul might turn to good if thou
Should even die by my darts. But think no more
Thou canst return alive from here.' [1]

But such passages where Rama himself speaks of his prowess are comparatively rare. The reader gets an idea of Rama's valour much more from the lips of the other characters and Rama's acts of heroism on the field than from Rama's speeches. The reader will remember Ravana's description of his first battle with Rama. The terrible Parashu Rama when he sees him bend with ease the bow with which he challenged him, bows down his head in acknowledgment of defeat and says,

'I doubt not now that thou art Vishnu's self!
Saved is the earth from all her ills, for ev'n
The bow I gave thee now cannot suffice
For thy lion strength!' [2]

The invincible Vali, as the reader will find in Chapter XI, speaks of Rama's valour in no measured terms. And it is his valour more than anything else that binds the mighty Hanuman and Sugriva to his cause and to himself for ever. And

. . . . . . it humbled Ravan's pride :
No further proof thou need'st of Rama's valour. [3]

[1] VI xiv 252-255. [2] I xxii 38.

[3] *See* page 20. We do not describe in this chapter the exploits of Rama in detail, as we reserve them for the chapters dealing with the Rakshasas, and especially his great adversary Ravana.

If Rama's valour is great and unique, his magnanimity is greater and still more unique. We have seen how he abstained from further attacking Ravana when he stood defenceless and unarmed on the field of battle. Even while he was a mere youth, his chivalrous instincts were so delicate that he would not aim his arrow against Tadaka because she was a woman, and Vishvamitra had to persuade him hard to attack her, reminding him of her violence against all things living that came within her reach. The reader will remember that he entertains no rancour against Kaikeyi for bringing about his exile. When his father descends from *svarga* and embraces him on the battle-field in Lanka at the time of Sita's sacrifice, the one boon that he asks of him is to call back the curse which he had pronounced while still in the land of the living against Kaikeyi and Bharata. This is how our poet presents the colloquy between father and son :

> Thus Ram his father tenderly addressed :
> 'When thou wert here below, O father mine,
> Thou didst abjure my mother Kaikeyi
> And Bharata thy lawful son : grant me
> To-day that she may once again be mother
> To me, and he my brother as ever before.'
> 'I grant', said Dasharath, 'that guiltless Bharat
> Be once again thy brother : but the sinful she,'
> (And the hands that held his Rama to his heart
> Fell limp, the while he spake these vengeful words)
> 'The heartless one that robbed thee of thy crown
> And made thee wear these hermits' weeds, shall not
> Escape my curse!' The pure one thus replied :
> 'The sin was not my mother's, but rather mine,
> That I saw not the kingly office is
> The pregnant source of endless sins and crimes,
> And at thy bidding undertook to rule
> Ayodhya, thyself living. Once again,
> Therefore, let me plead with thee, call back that curse.'[1]

And when Ravana had fallen in battle, Rama does not, like Achilles, war with the dead, but directs Vibhishana to perform his obsequies with all traditional rites, saying—and how nobly—,

> Although his evil has cleaved our heart in twain,
> Let us forgive![2]

1 VI xxxvii 129-131. 2 VI xxxvi 216.

It is this magnanimity—greatness of soul—which makes him the Supreme *Sharanagata Vatsala,* the lover of the suppliant refugee. He is ever waiting with open arms to receive with love all, no matter who or what they may be, and whatever the injuries they may have done to him, if, relying upon nothing else, they take refuge in him. It is this large heart that embraces all, forgives all, receives all, that has endeared his name to all the children of Hindusthan from generation to generation. And it is this same grandeur of soul that has raised him from the position of an ordinary emperor to that of the hero of the great national epic of Bharata Khanda,[1] and from the position of the epic hero to very godhood. We shall give here some of the best instances of the display by him of this grand quality.

When on his entrance into the forest, the Rishis pray to him to protect them against the Rakshasas, Rama offers to them unhesitatingly his *abhaya,*[2] and says,

> ——— If they surrender not,
> My darts will bring them down e'en if they flee
> To other worlds! . . . . . .
> . . . . . . What use is life to me,
> If I end not the sinners that oppress
> Brahmans of holy vows? . . . . . .
> . . . . . . Whoso his life
> Does sacrifice for saving Brahmans, cows,
> Or feeble ones, aye whoso sacrifices
> His life for saving other life, behold
> He's worshipped by the gods![3]

Although Indra's son had injured Sita disguising himself as a crow, and although he himself had aimed against him in his anger his death-dealing *astra,* he yet pardons him when he falls at his feet and prays for protection. When Sugriva approaches him, worn, weak, oppressed, and hunted by his great brother, Vali, and he hears his (Sugriva's) story from the mouth of Hanuman, he at once swears, careless of all consequences, that he would destroy Vali and place Sugriva on the vacant throne. When Vali charges him with attacking him unawares, Rama repeats to him the vow that he had taken:

[1] The continent of Bharat—India.

[2] Protection,—*literally,* immunity from fear.

[3] III iii 17, 19, 21.

'It is my ever-pressing vow to help
Th' oppressed, the poor, and those forlorn [1] . . .'

When Vibhishana, the brother of Ravana, comes to Rama's camp as a refugee from the wrath of his brother, Rama consults the Vanara Council as to whether they should admit him as a friend or no. Differences of opinion naturally arise, among which the most interesting is that of Sugriva who forgets his own past record and opposes the admission of Vibhishana on the ground of his treachery to his own brother. But, after hearing all of them, Rama finally accepts the opinion of Hanuman, giving expression at the same time to the following grand sentiments :

'Let there be victory, let be defeat,
I cast not out the man that refuge takes
In me. Why speak of this Vibhishana ?
Let come to me as suppliant the man
Whose cruel hands my parents, brothers, friends,
Had done to death. If leaving all other hope
He comes to me, himself surrendering,
Thenceforth he is my brother, lover, friend !
Ev'n if he does prove false, my glory nev'r
Would be eclipsed : 'twill only burn more bright.' [2]

He is ready even to forgive Ravana if he would come back to virtue and wholly surrender himself to him. For, does not Indrajit himself say to his father,

'If thou wilt cease desiring Janaki,
Their[3] wrath will cool, and they will go from hence
Forgiving us our evil ways.' [4]

Such is the grandeur of soul of this supreme hero !

We need not expatiate much on Rama's loyalty to his pledged word, because the whole story is hinged and motived on that loyalty. But we should not forget that Rama gives as much respect to the promise forcibly exacted by his step-mother from his father as he gives to his own pledged word. When Kausalya prays him not to leave her, he silences her by saying that he should not make his father's spoken word a lie. So he would not go back to Ayodhya even after his father's death, and even though

[1] IV vii 102.
[2] VI iv 108, 109.
[3] Rama's and Lakshmana's.
[4] VI xxvii 6.

Bharata himself places the crown at his feet. He would not have been the hero that he is, if he had listened to Bharata and if he had taken back the crown that he offered to return. *Satyasankalpa* [1], and *Dridhavrata* [2], these are the titles that he loves most, and these titles no hero in story or in life deserves in an equal degree with Rama.

With this we shall close the study of Rama's character. Not that we have exhaustively described or even mentioned all the fine traits in the character of this great hero. We can write about the delicate way in which he manages his friends and allies. For, he always knows, as if by instinct, what to say to each and when to say. For instance, when he accepts Hanuman's opinion regarding the admission of Vibhishana, he makes the rest of the Vanaras also accept the opinion cheerfully by saying,

> 'But for your excess of prudent care for me, would not every one of you have told me yourselves that we should unhesitatingly take unto ourselves the suppliant Rakshasa ?' [3]

And look at the delicacy with which, after removing from Sugriva's mind the sense of his defeat in debate by the preceding words, he asks him to go and bring him the Rakshasa chief.

We can also write much about the great respect he always shows to his elders, how even when he is obliged to contradict or disobey them, as, for example, when Vasishtha reiterates and supports Bharata's request to him to return to Ayodhya, he makes them feel that he does not abate one jot from the reverence that he owes them. We can write about his uniform kindness and ready accessibility even to the lowest of the low. But, all this is unnecessary. We hope, we have given the reader sufficient material to form an adequate mental picture of the Rama of Kamban, and we hope that this will create in him a desire to study the poet in his own words and enjoy the entire picture with all its details filled in.

And where is Rama's like or superior in epic story ? Can we name Nestor along with him ? Can we name Ulysses ? Can we name the pious Æneas ? Can we name Yudhishthira or Bhishma ? Can we name along with him even the Messiah of the *Paradise Lost* or Him of the *Paradise Regained* ? We think every one of these falls short by many an inch of the stature of

1 He whose one dynamic motive is truth.

2 He who never gives up a worthy resolution.

3 VI iv 120.

our Rama. Rama has the valour of Achilles, but is free from the littleness that would, for instance, conjure Jove to hurl the Greeks, his own countrymen,

> . . . . . . headlong to their fleet and main,
> To heap the shores with copious death and bring
> The Greeks to know the curse of such a King.

Rama has the dignity of Nestor and the cleverness and the skill of Ulysses, but Nestor lacks the fire and delicate moral sensibility, and Ulysses the straightness, of the *Prachanda Kodhanda Rama* [1] who will go through fire rather than go back upon his pledged word. The Messiah is not worked up by Milton with the same power with which he has worked up his Satan and Beelzebub or Adam and Eve, and his figure does not leave a lasting impression upon the readers' imagination as does the figure of Satan ; and there is a shadowiness about him which takes away a great deal from him, though as literary creations they impress the reader with no less force than the character of our hero.

In fact, Valmiki searched long for an ideal hero whose achievements he could work out into a *Mahakavya*, and Narada suggested to him the name of Shri Rama as the proper subject for his contemplated poem. And, grandly has Valmiki exalted and idealised the character of the great hero. But if Valmiki's Rama is grand, Kamban's Rama is, as we have remarked before, grander still. Kamban would leave no littleness, no crookedness, no commonness, in his hero.

If Kamban's Rama admits Vibhishana into his friendship, he would not immediately question him about the defences of Lanka, so as to give the impression, as Valmiki's hero does, that he took him primarily for his usefulness as Lanka's traitor. When Viradha lifts Sita up in order to carry her off, Valmiki's Rama laments in these words :

> *'O my Lakshmana, the intentions of Kaikeyi towards us, the object with which she claimed and obtained her prayer, the desire nearest to her heart—have all been very quickly fulfilled today. For, far-sighted woman that she is, she was not satisfied merely with obtaining the crown for her son ; she took care to banish me to the forest also—me who have the good of all beings at heart. Behold, today my step-mother's heart must be verily delighted !'*

1 Rama of the terrific bow called Kodhanda.

Again, when Sita has been actually carried off by Ravana, Valmiki makes his Rama say to Lakshmana :

> '*When I am dead for the sake of Sita, and when thou art gone, would not Kaikeyi's heart be full of joy? And would not holy Kausalya, the mother bereaved of her son, have to wait on Kaikeyi who has her son living and who has everything that she desires in the world?*'

But the thoughts of Kamban's Rama, as we have remarked in another connection, never descend to this weak accusation of Kaikeyi. They are always pitched in a higher key. Never from his lips fall any words that condemn Kaikeyi who has done him so much injury—not even when the worst misfortunes befall him. Valmiki again, makes his Sita, while at Ashokavana, to apostrophise Rama and say,

> '*Perhaps, thy father's hard commands fulfilled,*
> *Thou art returned to fair Ayodh ; and there*
> *Perhaps, thy vows performed, thou fearless sport'st*
> *With large-eyed virgins young.*'

But Kamban's Rama is too grand to be capable of being suspected thus by his beloved Sita. For the thoughts of Kamban's Sita, while she is in this mood, would only take this line :

> 'Perchance his brothers and mothers, have they come
> Again, and called him back to lovely Oudh ?
> But he would ne'er return, the while the days
> To Kaikeyi vowed unfulfilled yet remain.
> Alas, has any ill befallen him ?'[1]

We may go on multiplying instances without end to show to how great a height Kamban has raised the character of Rama. But we hope that even the most partial admirer of Valmiki will be satisfied with the extracts that we have given from our poet, and will accept our contention that Kamban's Rama is cast in a grander mould than Valmiki's hero. And if he is superior to Valmiki's hero, is he not *Mahavira* indeed,—the grandest among the heroes of epic poetry ?

[1] V iii 17.

CHAPTER VII

LAKSHMANA

HIS CHARACTER AND HIS FIRST BATTLES WITH INDRAJIT.

In this chapter, we take up the study of the character and exploits of Lakshmana, the brother and inseparable companion of Rama. Lakshmana has identified himself so much with Rama that the devotees of Rama in the Tamil-land delight to call him by the name of '*younger lord*'. His valour is equal to that of Rama himself, for he is able to bring down 'the first' of those that wield the bended bow, namely, Indrajit, the son of Ravana. But the mainspring of his character is not valour or heroism, though he possesses these qualities to a wonderful degree, but love—an all-absorbing, self-forgetting love—for his brother, the chief of his race and the first of men.

We do not see much of him in the First Book. He, of course, accompanies Rama to the forest when Vishvamitra takes Rama to guard his sacrificial grounds against Tadaka and her host. He is perfected in his knowledge of archery by the old Rishi who teaches him along with Rama the method of invoking magical weapons. He marries a daughter of Janaka at Mithila. But, generally speaking, he is but the shadow of Rama all through the Balakanda of the *Ramayana*.

His character, however, unfolds itself rapidly in the Second Book of the poem. He accompanies Rama to the Durbar Hall when their father sends for the latter, and is present when Dasharatha announces to Rama his intention to crown him as sovereign of Ayodhya. But when the next morning Kaikeyi sends suddenly for Rama, Lakshmana does not go with him, and so is ignorant of the new developments that are taking place. The news, however, is not long in reaching him, and when he hears that his beloved brother is being deprived of his rightful crown by the machinations of his step-mother, his whole frame throbs with uncontrollable anger, and he starts for fight like a cobra provoked. Says the poet,

> When Lakshman learnt that Kaikai had the pledge
> Revoked of Dasharatha, and forced exile
> On Ram, he rose indignant like the fire
> That doth on Dissolution's Day all things

Consume. His eyes shot flame ; his front shone bright
Like noon-day sun, and scorched his very hair ;
And sweat suffused his limbs ; his breath came in
And went tempestuous ; and terrific
He looked like Adi Shesh [1] himself, in all
His fury roused ! [2]

When he grasped the full significance of the news that reached his ears, he laughed aloud saying,

'Doth she desire to give to a dog the meat prepared for a lion-cub ? Wise indeed is Kaikeyi !' [3]

He put on his armour, girded on his sword, and took his bow and quiver. He wore on his ankle the anklet worn by the invincible hero. And as he strode along the streets of Ayodhya, the fell sound of his anklet-bells rose and fell shaming the roar of the sea ; and none dared to encounter him. And he challenged all men saying,

'I stand prepared to lighten Mother Earth,
Extinguish all the sons of guilt, and heap
Their lifeless corpses up to heaven, and crown
My Ram as Ayodh's king. Whoe'er desires
To offer battle, let them come ! Be't gods
Or Nagas, Vidyadhars, men or ev'n the Three
Supreme who challenge me, I let no woman
Usurp the throne in this my sacred land.' [4]

As he was thus striding the earth like the very Meru mountain endowed with life, frowning on all around even as the burning midday sun, Rama heard the twang of his bow-strings the while he was consoling Sumitra in her grief at the sudden news of his parting. And,

His golden anklet glittering in the sun,
Breathing ambrosial words, he hurried on
To where his Lakshman stood : so flies the cloud
To quench the wind-fanned flaming forest fire
Fume-crowned. [5]

[1] The thousand-hooded divine cobra on the Sea of Milk, on whose lap sleeps the Supreme Narayana. Lakshmana is the *avatar* of Adi Shesh.

[2] II iv 116.

[3] II iv 117.

[4] II iv 121, 122.

[5] II iv 125.

Rama saw him armed from head to foot and frowning against all things living, and asked him,

> 'Why art thou armed for battle, my Child?
> Surely thou art not going to fight the gods!'[1]

Lakshmana replied,

'I have vowed to crown thee king, and that in the very face of her who has murdered truth and robbed thee of thy rightful inheritance. And even if it is the gods that stand in the way, they all shall burn in the fire of my wrath. When I hold the bow in this hand, even the gods will not dare to oppose me. If any oppose, they will be but targets for my fiery darts. And I will give thee the crown of all the earth! Deign to receive it at my hands.'

Rama tried to cool him by appealing to his sense of filial obedience and generally to his sense of righteousness. But Lakshmana did not grow calm. Burning like Rudra[2] himself in his anger, he burst out saying,

'I know not father, mother, or lord: thyself alone art master, mother, father, all to me. Thou hast learnt to give away what is thine: now see me give back thy own to thee!'[3]

But when Rama asked him,

> 'How wilt thou win the crown for me, my child?
> Wouldst thou fight Bhar't the just, over-faultless,
> Or wouldst thou kill th' adored of virtuous men
> Our father? Or wouldst thou fight our mother?'[4]

Lakshmana could only say,

> 'Let enemies insult thee in their pride,
> Meekly I'll bear it all. Am not I born
> To bear the burden of these idle arms
> And pompous bow, impotent to avenge
> Our injuries?'[5]

And he became, says the poet, 'even like the ocean that keeps from overflowing its bounds in obedience to the will of that same Rama.'

1 II iv 126. 2 God of Destruction. 3 II iv 137.
4 II iv 139. 5 II iv 140.

In the few words, 'I know not father, mother or lord : thyself alone art master, mother, father, all to me,' is contained the key to the whole character of Lakshmana. He cannot bear to see his Rama suffer in any way. So, when Kaikeyi's maids bring to Rama coarse hermit's weeds to wear, Lakshmana says to them in bitterness,

'Behold, there stands he who is born to wear
All that she sends in the hardness of her heart ;
And me behold, whose fate it is to look
Impotently on all these rending sights !'[1]

When Rama has put on those coarse garments, Lakshmana does not say anything but himself also silently and as a matter of course casts off his own royal robes and puts on the forest-dweller's garb. But when Rama expostulates with him and prays to him to remain in Ayodhya, his love receives a shock, and like a wounded lover he asks Rama, 'In what have I offended thee ?' For he cannot so much as imagine how Rama could think of parting from him even when going to the forest. And then he continues thus :

'Fishes live not if waters fail ; and all
That lives must die if Mother Earth give way.
Now tell me, brother, on what do Sita's life
And mine depend . . . .
. . . . Thy words that bid me stay,
While thou do'st Ayodh leave behind—these words
Are crueller far than those that bade me calm
My wrath against thy enemies. Thy wealth,
And all that is thine own thou leavest here :
Wouldst thou abandon also us, my brother ?'[2]

Such was Lakshmana's love for his Rama. It was now Rama's turn to yield. He saw Lakshmana's face and his own eyes filled with tears. How could he desist from tears at such words, and how could he desist from taking him with himself in his exile ?

And how Lakshmana serves his brother in the forest ! His one study is to look after every little comfort of Rama and

[1] II iv 149. [2] II iv 157, 159.

guard him against all enemies known and unknown. It is he that builds the leaf-cottages wherever they move in the forest-country. It is he that gathers their food. It is he that mounts guard about the cottage while his Rama and Sita sleep undisturbed in the bed that he has lovingly made for them.

Guha sobs aloud when he sees the devotion of Lakshmana in watching, bow in hand, over Rama and Sita the livelong night. And Rama himself when he asks him to crown Vibhishana as king of Lanka, addresses him as 'my child of the sleep-forswearing eye,' and shows how the thought of all that his brother suffers for him is never absent from his heart.

Now this intense love for Rama makes Lakshmana regard as his own mortal enemies all who have injured Rama. He never stops to inquire whether they have actually injured him. It is sufficient if he believes that they have injured, or even suspects them to have injured Rama. This passion of hatred clouds his mind in all that concerns Kaikeyi and those connected with her. So, when Sumantra after carrying in his chariot Rama, Lakshmana and Sita to the forest takes leave of them, and asks them if they have any word to send home, Lakshmana for his part sends this message. He says,

> " Have I a message too for him, as if
> He were my king, who promised first the crown
> To Ram, and then in the sacred name of truth
> Resigned the throne in favour of his queen ?
> And then to Bharat proud this shalt thou say,
> 'Behold, Saumitri [1] liveth yet, although
> His hands unworthy failed to fight for Ram.'
> And this thereunto add as if for me,
> 'Lakshman forsweareth kinship with the son
> Of Kaikeyi.' " [2]

So also, when Bharata comes to the forest accompanied by the whole population of Ayodhya in order to request Rama to return and assume the crown, Lakshmana, as soon as he espies the moving host, jumps to the conclusion that he comes with a hostile design against Rama. So he rushes into the cottage, puts on his armour, makes ready his bow and quiver, and thus unburdens himself to Rama :

1 Matronymic from Sumitra, Lakshmana being Sumitra's son.
2 II v 43, 45.

'Behold yon Bharata, now an out-caste to this world as he has already become an out-caste to the next! Thou wilt see the prowess of thy brother's single right arm against him and all his hosts. Thou wilt see me destroy the troops of Bharata and make *Svarga* bend under the weight of quick-rushing *immigrants*, the while Earth is lightened of her load. Thou wilt see rivers of blood floating with the carcasses of his elephants and horses, and with his broken chariots flowing to the sea and making the seven oceans one... Thou wilt see my feathered arrows pierce the hearts of those twin-brothers [1]; and fly through the ethereal void carrying their bleeding flesh in their beaks. By the command of the tyrant prince, who was thereto induced by his favourite queen, Bharata is now the Sovereign of the Earth: thou wilt presently see him ruling in Hell at my command! And thou wilt soon see the guilty Kaikeyi roll on the ground in inconsolable grief, who delighted not long ago in the tears of thy mother when thou leftest for the jungle-country!' [2]

Such is the violence of his wrath that Rama listens quietly to all his out-pourings till they exhaust themselves, and then alone attempts to reason with him. And even then see how he begins his reply with delicate flattery:

'Do not I know, my Lakshmana, that there lives none that can stay thy hand if thou desirest to confound even the fourteen worlds? But, my brother, hast thou thought that in the long list of our glorious ancestors, there has never been born one who ever swerved from the path of virtue?' [3]

But, whenever it is not a question of Kaikeyi or Bharata, Lakshmana's mind sees clear as crystal. He is in all other matters the wisest of the wise and the wariest of the wary. His devotion to Rama and Sita gives him a power of insight which is denied to Rama himself. So if Sita and Rama are deceived by the beauty of the golden deer, Lakshmana suspects treachery even at the very first sight of him. As Sita's and Rama's attraction for him grows greater, Lakshmana's suspicion grows only deeper. When Rama sets out to go and capture the deer for Sita Lakshmana warns him saying,

[1] Bharata and Shatrughna. Shatrughna, though the twin brother of Lakshmana, is the inseparable companion of Bharata as Lakshmana is of Rama.

[2] II xii 30, 34, 36, 38-40.

[3] II xii 42, 43.

'If we pursue the deer, of this be sure,
We'll find ourselves encompassed by the guile
Of Rakshasas.' [1]

But Rama will not listen to him. He replies,

. . . . . . 'If this prove a Rakshasa disguised
He dies, and thereby I fulfil my vow;
If but a deer I capture him for Sita.' [2]

Lakshmana again makes an attempt to dissuade him. He retorts,

'But . . . who is behind the veil
We know not; this mysterious golden deer,
What he may be, we hardly care to think.
Forego therefore the hunt, my brother. For wise
Are they that have condemned the pleasures of sport.' [3]

Rama laughs at his fears, but his suspicions are not allayed. He proposes that at least Rama should stay at home and that he himself would go and hunt the deer and bring him to Sita. But, as the reader knows, his wisdom and forethought are useless as Cassandra's prophesies. Sita goes into a pet, and Rama, to satisfy her, asks Lakshmana to look after Sita and starts off himself in pursuit of the magic deer and, finding the dead body of the Rakshasa in place of the deer, he exclaims to himself—but too late to be of any use—'Ah wise, verily wise is my dear child!'

Similarly again, when Maricha, struck down by Rama's dart, (who was the Rakshasa that had come assuming the form of the deer) groans piteously as he falls, but assuming the voice of Rama, Lakshmana is not at all deceived. He shows no anxiety for the safety of Rama. But Sita fears the very worst. She frowns at Lakshmana's coolness, and, in spite of his assurances, darts cruel words at him which force him to leave her and go on the trace of Rama's footsteps, the while his mind is tortured with the worst forebodings for Sita's safety.

When Lakshmana and Rama return together to the cottage and see not Sita, it is Lakshmana that calms Rama and suggests

1 III vii 232. 2 III vii 233. 3 III vii 234.

that they should pursue the trace left on the ground by Ravana's car. On the way they find a flag fallen on the ground, and signs of fierce combat. When they see a number of golden crowns fallen pell-mell here and there, it is Lakshmana that suggests that Sita might have been carried off by Ravana, and that Jatayus might be engaging with him on the way. They hurry on and hear the story of Ravana's flight from the dying Vulture-King. When Jatayus dies, Rama's heart is torn with grief and he weakens for a moment. But Lakshmana brings him to himself with his heartening words.

After this we see Lakshmana again at his best in the Book of Battles. We get only little glimpses of him before the war commences. For instance, we see him maim Shurpanakha and kill Ajomuki, the Rakshasi, who like Shurpanakha sought him with lustful intent. We see him charge Sugriva with unbrotherly conduct, and receive a sharp reprimand at the hands of Rama. We see him carry Rama's angry message to Sugriva, who, in his drunken revels, forgets to come to Rama with his forces at the appointed time. We see him take the word out of Rama's mouth when Vali puts to Rama his last question, and give to Vali the plausible answer which Rama would not and could not give.[1] In all these places, however, he is only a side-actor. It is only in the Yuddha Kanda that he has the stage wholly to himself for long periods at a stretch.

Lakshmana distinguishes himself greatly in the very first fight with Ravana. The reader will remember Ravana's unstinted praise of his archery and skill in war.[2] But he falls wounded by an arrow of Ravana. Ravana attempts to take him prisoner but is unable to lift him from the ground. The hands that could lift Mount Kailasa itself, with Shiva upon it, have not the power to lift Lakshmana from the ground—such is the divine power confined in that mortal body! But Hanuman rushes in and snatches the body of Lakshmana and carries him with ease to the camp.

On the second day when Kumbhakarna carries everything before him and bears without flinching the shock of the huge rock that Hanuman threw against him with all his force, the latter says to himself,

> 'Scatheless he stands the shock! the hugest rocks
> Seem powerless to bend or break his adamant frame!

[1] *See* Chapter XI.

[2] *See* Ch. XIII; also p. 20.

Saumitri's[1] fiery darts alone, perchance,
(If mortal weapons can avail), can have
The strength to pierce his giant shape.'[2]

Lakshmana, on his part, seeing the havoc that Kumbhakarna is working in the Vanara army hastens towards that part of the field and restores the fight shooting down the Rakshasas by the hundred and by the thousand. Seeing his skill and aim and force, Kumbhakarna exclaims,

'The God who burned the cities three alone
Can rival Lakshman in the bowman's art!'[3]

and directs his chariot against him. When Hanuman sees him come against Lakshmana, he leaps with joy saying,

'These eyes will witness now unheard of deeds
Of valour,'[4]

and runs to Lakshmana and asks him to seat himeslf on his broad shoulders.

When Lakshmana had seated himself on the shoulders of Hanuman, Kumbhakarna challenged him, saying,

'Behold, thou art the brother of Ram, and I
Am brother to mighty Ravana: and lo,
The Gods assemble round to witness our deeds
Of war. 'Fore them I swear that I shall cleave
In twain the sacrilegious hands that dared
To hold my sister by the hair and her
Deformed!'[5]

Lakshmana replied,

'Not learned in the braggart's art, we can
But answer thee with th' arrows point.'[6]

The fight now began in right earnest. The Rakshasa shot numberless darts from his mighty bow, and Lakshmana broke

1 Lakshmana's.
2 VI xv 203.
3 VI xv 228.
4 VI xv 230.
5 VI xv 234, 235.
6 VI xv 236.

their fury with his own arrows before they could reach him. Again Kumbhakarna sent hundreds of arrows against him. Lakshmana's swifter arrows scattered them away. Now Kumbhakarna hit Hanuman with an arrow and Lakshmana also with a couple of fierce darts. But Lakshmana, in spite of his deep wounds, bent his bow almost to a circle and shot down and destroyed Kumbhakarna's war-chariot and broke the bow in his hand. Just at that moment the reinforcements sent by Ravana arrived and engaged Lakshmana leaving Kumbhakarna time to arm himself. Kumbhakarna, however, after this sought other enemies, and Lakshmana's part in this day's fight ended with the struggle with these newly arrived Rakshasas.

Kumbhakarna fell by the hand of Rama in this second day's battle. When news reached Lanka that Kumbhakarna had fallen, Atikaya, one of the three sons of Ravana, swore that he would kill Lakshmana and make Rama grieve for his brother even as Ravana was grieving for his own brother, and marched to the battle with great *eclat*. Vibhishana knew his strength and hinted to Rama that Lakshmana might probably be unequal to the fight. But Rama smiled at his doubts and praised Lakshmana's valour in these words :

> 'Ten thousand thousand Ravanas may oppose
> And all the Gods, and who in other worlds
> Are counted mighty ; may be Three Supreme
> May try, and join their strength with theirs ; e'en then
> They can't outmatch our Lakshman's warlike skill !
> Can heaven stand his deadly aim, or earth ?
> Breathes there an archer who can wield the bow
> As he ? What's Vishnu, Indra, Shiva, or I
> Myself, before him, if he frown ?'[1]

This is the only occasion where Rama seriously praises Lakshmana in his presence.

Lakshmana did obeisance to Rama and started for the fight. The battle raged furiously. The Vanara army was pressed back by the onrush of the Rakshasas ; Lakshmana encouraged them by his voice and by the twang of his mighty bow which was

> The favourite home of Yama, the God of Death.

1 VI xvii 78, 79.

Elephants and cavalry, chariots and Rakshasa infantry were destroyed by the hundred thousand. Daruka and Kala, Kulisa and Kala Shanka, Malin and Marut attacked him with tridents and lances and maces. But Lakshmana's arrows broke or turned away the missiles and killed the Rakshasas in the end. In the evolutions of the battle, Lakshmana came face to face with the main wing of the army commanded by Atikaya, and did great havoc. Seeing the force of his arrows, mountains trembled and the thunder-laden clouds feared for their safety. Hanuman joined, and in the sight of Atikaya killed Devantaka with a blow of his iron fist, and challenged and killed Trishiras who came to support Atikaya. Atikaya, however, did not waste time in attacking Hanuman but went for Lakshmana straight, saying to himself,

> 'It is not the part of wisdom to take up another enterprise when my first vow is unaccomplished.'[1]

Lakshmana seated himself now on the shoulders of Angada who followed every movement of Atikaya's chariot to the admiration of the Vanara army. After shooting down Atikaya's guards, Lakshmana addressed the Rakshasa in this wise :

> 'Desirest thou t' engage with me when all
> Thy men have met their fate or dost intend
> To try thy strength with me before ? The choice
> Is thine !'[2]

Atikaya replied,

> 'Others shall watch our combat : I am seeking
> Alone to meet thee, though the gods may stand
> By thee and offer battle. Thou may'st call
> Thy brother to give thee aid or Shiv himself
> And all the gods of heaven or other worlds :
> And yet this day shall be thy last !'[3]

So saying he blew his sonorous conch. But Lakshmana only smiled and said,

> 'Of those that thou didst name, not one will come
> T' engage with thee. If fall I must, I fall
> Alone. Tell thee this. If me thou beat,
> Thou wilt have conquered also them !'[4]

1 VI xii 180.
2 VI xvii 188.
3 VI xvii 189, 190.
4 VI xvii 191.

and then twanged his bow and sent an arrow laden with lightning against the chest of Atikaya. Atikaya sped first one arrow to meet it in the air and turn it off from him, and then sent sixteen other arrows, fierce like cobras, against Lakshmana. Lakshmana cut them off with darts of equal force, pierced Atikaya's armour, and while he fainted with loss of blood chivalrously turned to another side and sowed the Rakshasa part of the battle-field with falling corpses.

When Atikaya recovered and saw the havoc played by Lakshmana's arrows, his pride was up and he sent a veritable iron-hail against him.

> His arrows covered the sky and all the bounds
> Of heaven ; the earth, it bristled with his darts.
> The Vanar heroes screaming rolled, tossed by
> That iron-tempest . . . . Rocks to pieces flew
> Struck with the darts of mighty Atikay.[1]

The sky became overcast. The sun was hidden behind a cloud of arrows. The earth trembled under the shock of missiles struggling against each other in mid-air.

> The Devas, each his neighbour trembling asked,
> 'Is all the Vanar host to end this day ?
> Has Lakshman skill and strength to master him ?
> 'Sit from the God of Death that Atikaya
> His wondrous archery did learn ?'[2]

Atikaya wounded Angada and Lakshmana as well. But Lakshmana's blood was up ; with one shower of lightning-laden arrows he cut off the heads of the Rakshasa's horses and broke the bow, and when he leaped up another chariot, sent against him the *Agni Astra*.[3] But Atikaya sent the *Surya-Astra,* the weapon inspired by the Sun-God, to tame it down. While these two weapons were struggling against each other, Lakshmana pierced the Rakshasa's body with his sharpest arrows, but still he fought on unmindful of his wounds. Fiercely, and more fiercely, came his arrows, and Lakshmana could barely parry them. Just then Vayu, the Wind-God, whispered to Lakshmana that his adversary could not die by any other weapon except the

[1] VI xvii 197, 198. [2] VI xvii 198.
[3] Weapon inspired by the Fire-God.

Brahmastra, the weapon of the greatest power. Lakshmana, therefore, sped the *Brahmastra* and lo, the arrow cut Atikaya's head clean from the trunk and carried it off.

This battle with Atikaya, great as it is, is only a rehearsal for Lakshmana's greater battles with Indrajit. For Kamban, like Valmiki, reserves the great Indrajit as the fit target for Lakshmana's arrow. Already in the Sundarakanda he had made Hanuman exclaim to himself when he saw Indrajit sleeping in his palace in Lanka,

'Is he the Rakshasas' king or Kartikey,
The son of Mahadeva, God of gods?
He looks like a lion sleeping in his den:
A terrific fight I see in the days to come
When Lakshmana and Ram encounter him.'[1]

And at the close of the combat with Atikaya, the poet finely suggests the coming battles with Indrajit in the following lines:

When wise Vibhishan saw this feat of arms
And heard the shout of gods above, he leaped
With joy, and said, 'If this is his matchless skill
In war, the fate of Indrajit himself
Is sealed.[2]

Great was the consternation in Lanka when the news spread there that Atikaya was dead. When Danamala, the mother of Atikaya, heard that her son had fallen on the field, she came beating her breasts and fell sobbing at the feet of Ravana who was himself aghast at the death of his son; and she vented her grief at the loss of her son and chid Ravana in the following words:

'Where is my child, the apple of mine eye?
Show me my son, Oh bring him back to me!
The Gods themselves did envy me as mother
Of him whom even Indra could not beat
In war: ah me, I see him delivered up
As prey to th' arrow of a man to-day.
Aksha is dead, and dead is Atikay,
And fallen are the warriors great in might.

1 V ii 141. 2 VI xvii 208.

Among thy sons Mandodari's son alone
Is yet alive : now once again attempt
Thy world conquests ! . . . Silent thou sitst ! . . where now
Is gone thy might ? Hast lost the strength to tame
Thy powerful foes ? Hear'st thou my words ? Or hearing
Dost thou not understand ? Or wilt not hear ?
Wilt thou not weep at least for thy warriors dead ?
Oh cruel ! Black ruin has thou brought on us.
Cursed, thrice cursed is thy guilty lust :
And yet is this the last of the ills that are
To blight our race for Sita's sake.'[1]

The lamentations of Danamala and her companions reached the ears of Indrajit and, when he heard that it was Atikaya that had fallen on the field, he swore that if he should not fell to earth, that same day, Lakshmana who took his life, he would give himself in slavery to Indra whom he had twice defeated in battle. He then put on his armour, selected his troops, and marched to the war in a chariot drawn by a thousand lions, preceded by goblins and ghouls who heralded his approach saying,

'Behold the hero that brought Indra down as a prisoner tied to his chariot wheels !'[2]

Lakshmana had not left the field, thinking that, after the fall of Atikaya, either Ravana himself or at least Indrajit would head the next attack. And he was ambitious to try his mettle against one of them. So when the grand warrior—'who had only seen the back of the gods flying for life and never their faces'—came near, Lakshmana asked Vibhishana who he was. Vibhishana replied,

'He is the hero who has crushed in war
The king of Devas : hot will be the fight
This day,'[3]

and advised him to take Hanuman, Sugriva, and other Vanara heroes to support him in battle.

As Lakshmana accepted his advice, Angada came back to him, and Hanuman also hastened to him. On seeing him pitted against the greatest warrior among the Rakshasas, Sugriva

1 VI xvii 269-272. 2 VI xviii 21. 3 VI xviii 28.

brought the pick of his troops in front and the attack commenced.

The encounter of the two armies was like two seas dashing at each other in full flood-tide. The Devas who had come down to earth to witness the greatest fight that mortal or immortal eyes could look upon, shut their ears to the deafening sounds of the trumpets and conches and the challenging shouts of the opposing heroes. The very field of battle cracked by the terrific force of the arrows and lances, trees and rocks hurled against each other by the contending armies, and the shattering encounter of Vanara and Rakshasa heroes. Blood flowed in torrents, carrying the floating corpses of dead heroes on either side. Death, parading in the form of Vanara heroes, broke the heads of the Rakshasas with trunks of uprooted trees, drank their life, or smashed their arms and feet. Even after the lances had pierced their vitals, the Vanaras sprang upon their enemies and died only after mauling them or crunching them in their iron jaws. In every part of the enemy's army you could find the Vanaras,—on the heads of elephants and of horses, on the chariots of the Rakshasa leaders, on the top-ends of their mighty bows, and sometimes on the heads of the Rakshasas themselves. The bodies of the Vanara heroes broken by the maces of the Rakshasas floated down to the sea over the rivers of blood flowing from the field. But even then the grip of their hands did not relax—they still held the rocks which they had uprooted in order to hurl against their foes! In the shambles made by the mighty paw of Hanuman, you could not distinguish either horse or elephant, banner or wheel, lance or bow or mace or even chariot.

The Rakshasa's assault now began in right earnest, and the common Vanaras fled from the field. But the leaders stood their ground and dammed the Rakshasa flood. The Rakshasas cared not who died or who lived, and dashed forward pounding the Vanaras with their maces and clubs. And yet, though suffering terribly, the Vanara leaders broke the force of the onset. Wherever Nila rushed, the eight-handed God of Death, Yama, armed with trident and axe and noose had his hands full capturing the souls of the falling Rakshasas. What is this sight? Is it a tempest? Or is it the roaring deep? Or is it all-consuming fire? No! It is the Vanara Kumuda who knocks down the Rakshasas: and Yama himself trembles at his work. Rishabha and Panaja, Jambhavan and Kesari, Mainda and his brother carry havoc in the enemy's ranks.

Seeking the Rakshasa attack broken by the leaders, the Vanaras that had fled away now formed up and were led to the

attack by the chiefs. The Rakshasa army was pushed back. Indrajit saw this, and full of anger and pride he now came to the front causing to quake the very earth and the ocean by the twanging of his mighty bow. The arrows discharged from his bow clove through the air like deadly cobras, and broke to pieces the rocks and tree trunks flung by the Vanaras, and pierced the large bodies of the Vanaras themselves. Hundreds of thousands of Vanaras had fallen before a *muhurta* [1] passed. But they died not in vain. Even at the moment of dying they would pull rocks by their roots and whirl them into the enemy's ranks. Nothing was visible owing to the tempest of arrows blowing from Indrajit's bow. No sound was heard except the thunder of its twang. The Vanaras turned and fled, unable to bear this whirlwind of missiles, and the Gods trembled when they saw their champions flying from field. The Rakshasa flood now recommenced to flow over. To stop it, Sugriva and Hanuman came forward whirling trees and fragments of rocks. When he caught sight of Hanuman, Indrajit remembered his exploits in Lanka when he had been there to look for Sita, and challenged him in the following words :

> 'Fly not ignoble, stand thy ground : I've come
> To the front seeking thee. Thou canst not wield
> The bow, but endless boast of great prowess
> Thou makest. Thinkest thou with stones and twigs
> To master me ?' [2]

Hanuman's reply was not less proud :

> 'Here also there be some, O feeble, who
> Can wield the banded bow, and thou wilt taste
> By proof their strength to-morrow if thou 'scape
> From here with life to-day. Face me if canst ;
> Think not thou hast an Indra here who fled
> In olden times before thy feeble arms !' [3]

and he defied him still further in these words :

> 'Wouldst fight with me ?
> Or wouldst thou measure thy strength with Lakshmana ?
> Or choosest thou to face the matchless chief
> Who has vowed to bring thy father's ten heads down ?
> The choice is thine to make.' [4]

[1] an hour and a half.
[2] VI xviii 73.
[3] VI xviii 74.
[4] VI xviii 75.

As soon as the Rakshasa heard the name of Lakshmana he remembered his oath and addressed Hanuman as follows :

'Where is that Lakshmana doomed who took the life
Of my lion brother and reserves his own
As target to my tearing darts ? I've come
To cool my wrath in his blood ! And when I shoot
The fiery arrows that the world can burn,
Can he and thou and all your vaunted force
Suffice to feed their hungry maw ? I'll send
My troops and generals all away ; alone
I'll stand, with none to back me but my bow
Invincible. And you may come with all
Your strength, and all that mortal men or gods
Can bring of force : the sun goeth not down
This day or ere your severed heads had rolled
Upon the plain !' [1]

So saying, Indrajit shot hundreds of arrows into Hanuman's mighty frame. But, though bleeding all over his body, Hanuman aimed a huge stone at him saying,

'In their thousands though they come, can elephants tame
The lordly lion boiling o'er with rage ?
If thou the patience lack to 'wait Saumitri,
And battle want, I give thee this, now guard
Thyself, if canst !' [2]

and hurled a huge rock at him.

But the rock broke into a thousand fragments when it struck the iron body of the Rakshasa, and, as if nothing had happened, he sent his shattering arrows against Hanuman. Hanuman was overwhelmed, but, just at that time, Nila came to his side and sustained the conflict. But neither he nor Angada who came to his support could long withstand that iron-hail.

Lakshmana saw this from a distance and hastened to the spot. The Rakshasa leaders who were furious against him for having killed Atikaya concentrated against him from all sides and aimed their deadly darts at him. But the cunning hand of Lakshmana was able to break their force and bring the Rakshasas also to the ground. Seeing the rapidity and force with which the arrows flew from his mighty bow, the gods exclaimed,

1 VI xviii 76, 77. 2 VI xviii 79.

'Is it from Lakshmana's archery that the rain-cloud
Learnt to rain in torrents ?'[1]

The Rakshasa flood abated completely, but Indrajit stood his ground like a rock rising sheer from the bosom of a dried-up sea. And piloting his chariot that dashed on with the quickness of his own thought he stood before Lakshmana. Hanuman, meanwhile, had recovered from his shock and rushed to the front and desired Lakshmana to seat himself upon his shoulders so as not to give the advantage to the charioted Rakshasa. The giant fight began.

Now thundered the twanging bows. At that terrific sound the very boundaries of the world were shot away from their places. The mountains split. The concave of heaven cracked. The whole universe became embroiled in a whirlwind of dust. The fierce arrows struggled in the air mauling each other to pieces. The Gods in *svarga* trembled for their lives, and crouched in their hiding places for safety. The universal sphere rocked to and fro like a frail boat in a tempest. Hanuman paralleled every evolution of the enemy's lion-drawn chariot. The arrows flew so thick that even the Gods could not see whether the combatants were alive or dead or wounded. The bounds of the earth cracked to pieces at the deepening tumult. The spectators, astonished at the mastery and skill displayed by the combatants and their super-human deeds, exclaimed to each other,

'Is not the art of archery infinite
And various ? And where is the limit set
To strength of muscle ? Wondrous is their skill
And prowess ! Who has ever fought like these ?
Never was seen such fight before, and ne'er
Will be !'[2]

There was no end to the flight of arrows. The two heroes parried each other's arrows and found time to aim newer ones against each other. Lakshmana's and Hanuman's bodies were flowing over with blood. The Rakshasa's chariots were broken one after another, and he got upon new chariots only to descend from their broken ruins the very next minute. Lakshmana's arrows killed the lions and horses that drew his chariot and tore

[1] VI xviii 95. [2] VI xviii 105, 106.

open his armour. His body itself became a running sore. But even in the midst of his terrible suffering he admired Lakshmana's archery and exclaimed,

> 'Superb is this man's skill with the bow. Let fools say that he may be Shiva or Brahma. If he is not Rama or Narayana himself, I do not know who he is! Who is there in our city who can match him in the art?'[1]

Seeing the plight of Indrajit, his guard flew to his help, and on this side Angada came to support Lakshmana and Hanuman. The Vanara heroes flung rocks and stones and tree-trunks, and the guard too was all but destroyed.

The Rakshasa was ashamed at the fate of his army and exclaimed to his associates, 'What shame is this? Our army of forty myriad myriad troops is destroyed! But they replied with pride, 'The Vanara forces are no less punished by the torrents of darts—we are not behind them in valour!' As Indrajit was still exhausted by the endless fight, such of his personal guards as were still alive took his place and continued the fight, but they too were soon overwhelmed.

The wounded Rakshasas ran panting for water, and panting died. Some slaked their thirst with water from the clouds and died drinking. Rakshasa women who had come to the field to encourage the heroes to greater heroism by their presence became *satis*[2] and died embracing their dying husbands on the battle-field itself. Some wounded Rakshasas warned their brothers and sons and said,

> 'If this should be the might of Rama's brother,
> The doom of Lanka is not far; so, fly
> Before death overtakes yon Indrajit.'
> And saying, died.[3]

Now, Lakshmana saw that one single final effort would finish his foe and so, exhausted as he was, he pulled himself together and bent his bow and sped against Indrajit arrows more powerful than Yama's. The darts tore sheer and felled down the new armour of the Rakshasa. But two of his faithful guards who were close by rushed against Lakshmana who was fighting singly from on the shoulders of Hanuman, and rained on him an iron-shower. Lakshmana, however, not only parried the arrows aimed

[1] VI xviii 120.
[2] Self-immolators on the funeral pyres of their husbands.
[3] VI xviii 167.

at him, but destroyed their bows and chariots shooting down their horses. They were not non-plussed but took their clubs and struck Hanuman on whom Lakshmana was seated. But who could match the great Maruthi in hand to hand fight? He plucked their two maces each with one hand, and would have smashed them had they not fled from the field in utter dismay.

Meantime the Vanara heroes who had retired from the battle returned, and the Rakshasas also rallied, and again a hail-storm of rocks and tree-trunks and clubs and shattering darts began to blow. Indrajit, who had by now recovered from his exhaustion, broke the force of the enemy's missiles with his mighty arrows saying, 'Is this all your boasted might?' The sun was about to sink into the western ocean. Vibhishana noticed the rapidly sinking sun and warned Lakshmana saying,

> 'Invincible is Rakshasas blood when Night
> Doth ride the heavens: if thou fell not the foe
> This minute, he wins, and all the laurels won
> This day do go in vain.' [1]

So with one mighty effort Lakshmana shot his terrific arrows against his great foe. The chariot broke into a thousand fragments, but the Rakshasa was not hurt. In a trice that 'most worthy among the workers of evil and dearly beloved of the Spirit of Illusion' assumed an invisible shape and rose from his shattered car, and entered the solid darkness of the lowering sky.

The gods were filled with joy when they saw no trace of Indrajit. And Lakshmana also was glad that victory had blessed his arms. He got down from Hanuman's shoulders and handed his mighty bow to Angada, and, as a preliminary to giving himself much needed rest, he began to pull out the arrows with which Indrajit had sown his body all over. But,

> Alas! He knew not that the hour was big
> With fate inevitable . . . . For, their foe
> Of cobras fierce the dreadful spell pronounced
> And sped on them his darts with mortal aim.
> Lo, every dart became a monstrous snake. . . .
> And hissing clove the air with force abnorm, . . .
> Driving the very darkness forth, and bound
> Their arms with many a scaly fold involved. [2]

[1] VI xviii 180.   [2] VI xviii 188-190.

The cobra-darts flew in their myriads and bound every one of the Vanara host after wounding them all over the body. Vibhishana alone was not touched as Indrajit had pronounced the incantation only against non-Rakshasas. Blood flowed in torrents. The heroes were writhing with pain. They were hungering to revenge themselves on the Rakshasa, but, whenever they tried to rise, the strangling hold of the serpents would drag them down and keep them transfixed to the spot where they had fallen. They would look at Lakshmana and feel for his bonds ten times more intensely than for their own torturing pains. They would ask Vibhishana, 'Is there no remedy for this?' They would say, 'Hanuman alone can save us in this plight,' and ask, 'Is he alive?' But Hanuman's mighty arms too were bound in the same living coil and he, though unmindful of his pain, was tortured with grief for the fate of Lakshmana. Angada, Nila, Sugriva himself—all were held prisoners in the same strangling hold. And Lakshmana,

> though conscious of power to break through his bonds was robbed of his will to break through, even as the human soul, though possessed of infinite wisdom, is still entangled in the folds of Maya.[1]

Soon a deadly silence began to creep over the Vanara army. The heart of Indrajit was at last glad. 'I have today accomplished my oath,' he said; 'Lakshmana and the monkey host are destroyed today, and after resting tomorrow I shall return and finish the other man and whatever remains of the Vanara army.' And, his heralds announcing his victory before him, he entered the gates of Lanka and proudly marched off to Ravana's palace, the while he was pursued by other missiles—the admiring glances of the Rakshasa damsels. There he announced his victory to his father, and taking his leave he went to his own palace and began to rest his tired limbs.

Rama had not come to the field this day, as he had the fullest confidence in Lakshmana's strength and valour, and as he desired to give him all the honours of the day.[2] When he was informed of the fate that had overtaken his brother, he was overwhelmed with grief. Having recovered from the first paroxysm of grief, he reprimanded Vibhishana on his coming near him for not calling him to the field when Indrajit came to engage Lakshmana.[3] But

1 VI xviii 201.

2 *See* page 111.

3 Rama did not intend to allow Lakshmana to fight without his aid against Indrajit. He permitted him to go alone only against Atikaya.

Vibhishana with tears in his eyes told him all that had happened, and how the last weapon was an unforeseen surprise even to him and added,

'They're living yet : but for the magic spell
Could ever mortal valour have sufficed
To bring them down ? Grieve not, therefore, my lord,
But hope : can sin o'er virtue ever prevail,'[1]

Rama now asked Vibhishana to tell him the nature and power of this cobra-noose of which he had never heard before. 'It was created by Brahma,' he replied, 'and obtained from him by Shiva and gifted over by Shiva to such as do very severe *tapas* and pray for it. And,

No force can ever loose its strangling hold :
It falls not till its victims die. If e'er
The noose can be uncoiled, self-uncoiled
Alone 'twill fall : not e'en the four-faced One
Supreme can break its mortal spell!'[2]

Rama cried out in despair,

'Shall I direct my darts against the Gods
Who forged the deadly arm ? Or shall I end
The worlds and take my life ? Shall I reduce
To ashes this sinful city ? If the God
Who framed this spell undoes its fatal force
I'll cool my wrath : if he refuse, be sure
Within a trice I end the universe
Even as Shiv the cities three! If dies
My brother, then what to me is glory ? What
Is Dharm ? And what is infamy ?'[3]

But how can he, who came down specially to protect the universe, continue for long in his mood ? And so the poet says,

. . . . . . But in his heart
The springs of mercy soon began to flow :
He called to mind how heinous it would be

[1] VI xviii 233. [2] VI xviii 232.
[3] VI xviii 238-240.

To end the worlds for wreaking vengeance on
A single foe ; and then unknowing what
To do, he sank in blank despair.[1]

When Rama was thus become a prey to despair, and the gods were trembling with fear as to how all this would end, the heavenly Eagle, Garuda, the terror of all serpents mortal and immortal, who also had been watching the combat along with the gods from a distance, spread his mighty wings for flight, and arriving at the place where Rama was standing, fell at his feet and worshipped him as his master, the Supreme Narayana Himself. At the very touch of the air flapped up by Garuda's wings, behold, the serpent noose lost its spell and the Vanara heroes and Lakshmana broke through their bonds as if they were no stronger than filaments of lotus stalk, and rose as if fresh from the hands of the Creator Himself. The magnificent stanzas in which Kamban describes the majestic flight and appearance of Garuda have scarcely a parallel in literature for the roll of their rhythm and the grandeur of the image that they present to the eye of imagination. Though conscious of the impossibility of giving an adequate translation of them, we feel bound to attempt a translation and give some idea to the reader of their grand swing.[2]

As soon as the Vanaras were released from the cobra-noose, they raised a shout that shook Lanka to its very centre, and Ravana soon learned that the magic spell was broken and that the Vanaras were as ready for fight as ever. He then sent for his son and told him that, as it was but natural that he should desire again to fight those that had escaped so narrowly from his hands, he should command the army that day also. But, as Indrajit was too tired, he requested his father to send others to engage the enemy, and so other leaders and Makaraksha, the son of Khara, were sent against the Vanara host.

Mahaparshva and Dumaraksha, two of the five commanders now proposed to be sent, were at first found out to be none but the guards of Indrajit that had fled from the field the previous day from the clubs of Hanuman, and Ravana

1 VI xviii 241.

2 The translation of these seven stanzas are missing in the manuscript. Aiyar appears to have postponed translating them but died before he could do it. They are verses 243 to 249 of the 18th *Padalam* of the Sixth Book. An inadequate translation is offered with apologies to Aiyar and the reader in Appendix I. (P)

ordered that their noses should be cut off and that they should be paraded through the streets of Lanka and proclaimed as base cowards. But Mali opposed, saying that they had fought very hard and stayed on the field almost up to the very last, and, if they had run away from the battle-field, Indrajit had also all but done the same. And who was not afraid in Lanka in these days? For, said he,

> 'In Lanka's streets let Lakshmana's name be called
> Aloud but once: alas, a panic wild
> At once does seize our people, and they'd hear
> No more but shut their doors amain! Such terror
> Inspires that dreaded name!'[1]

Ravana was, therefore, persuaded to give these commanders a fresh opportunity to retrieve their good name. They and the other commanders with their troops fought bravely but could not stand against the Vanaras. In the end they were all destroyed and Indrajit had again to take the field.

This second fight of Indrajit was still more furious than the first. Rama commanded the Vanara army to fall back, as they were unable to fight the divine weapons that the enemy was using, and took the field himself alone with the bow. Darts after darts flew against the enemy, laden with death. The vast army of Indrajit was blown to the winds, and Hanuman, seeing that grand display of the archer's art, smacked his broad shoulders with his mighty paw and sent up a shout of admiration and joy. When Lakshmana saw Indrajit coming forward to engage personally with Rama, he prayed his brother to allow him to fight the Rakshasa singly by himself. Said he,

> "The serpent noose, my brother, that helpless bound
> My limbs, has cast a slur upon my name;
> And men will point at me and say, 'his friends
> He could not save from worse than death; nor could
> He stand against a valiant foe; and yet
> He lives!' If Indrajitta's head, my darts
> Do not remove, the lustre of my name
> Is gone for ever. I burn t' engage this foe
> Unaided, thyself only looking on;
> And killing him in single fight, emblaze
> My name 'fore men for service leal done

[1] VI xix 13.

To thee, my king and lord. And witness heaven,
If Indrajit I bring not down this day,
May I the merit lose for ever that I
Have earned by service faithful done to thee."[1]

When Lakshmana took this solemn oath, the gods were filled with joy and said, 'the days of our grief are over!' And the endless worlds echoed that joy and the Spirit of Righteousness rejoiced. And the heart of Yama also was glad.

So, during this day, Rama plays but a minor part and even that only during the earlier hours of the battle.

The brothers blew their conches, and at the terrific sound even the lions yoked to the chariot of Indrajit trembled. Clubs and steel discuses, lances and spears, maces and sling-stones were now hurled at the brothers and also at the Vanaras who were drawn up at a distance. The fire-winged arrows of Lakshmana brought down the chariots and horses, elephants and Rakshasa heroes by the thousand. In that fell massacre you would not know which were the leaders and which the ordinary Rakshasa soldiers. Lakshmana's arrows would drop the head of the sons in the cars of the fathers and the mangled heads of the fathers in the chariots of their sons and then resume their flight. Rama also joined his fatal arrows to Lakshmana's, and in the end, Indrajit stood almost alone with his chariot broken, but, his high spirit as high as ever. And getting on to another chariot, and directing it to where the two brothers were standing, he addressed them and said,

'Would both of you today engage with me
Or desires one alone to fall a prey
To this dart? Or wish you with the remnants
Of your broken force to meet your fate? Decide,
I'll grant your every wish!'[2]

Lakshmana haughtily replied,

'I've sworn to fell thee dead upon this field
To-day. Thou mayest choose the sword or bow
Or lance or fists or any weapon else
Thy whim dictates: I'll meet thee arm for arm
And bring thee down.'[3]

[1] VI xxi 39-43.
[2] VI xxi 61.
[3] VI xxi 62.

The rejoinder of Indrajit is no less haughty :

> 'I mean today to make the elder brother
> 'Gainst nature's way survive the younger born.
> If first I send thee not to thy doom, and make
> Thy elder younger seem and mourn thy loss
> I call not myself son to mighty Ravan! . . . .
> Mistake me not for Kumbhakarna the brother,
> I am the son of Ravan! I have sworn
> To soothe the manes of those my brothers dead
> And him my mighty uncle, by oblations
> Offered in the red blood of both of you!'[1]

Lakshmana would not be beaten even in this war of words :

> He said, 'Vibhishana is with us here
> Destiny-chosen t' offer sacrifice
> To all the race of doomed Rakshasas.
> But that which thou to thy father owest dead,
> The water-sacrifice, I'll make him give
> Tear-mingled to thy predeceased soul!'[2]

Without further words the Rakshasa rained his fiery arrows upon Lakshmana and Angada, Hanuman and Rama. But Rama saw the Rakshasa alone and unaided, and so, did not bend his bow against him but let Lakshmana alone engage him. The sky was sown with flying darts burning and tearing each other to pieces, and everything around appeared to be on fire. Lakshmana could only parry Indrajit's swift-flying darts for a long time, but, when the Rakshasa's hand began slightly to slack owing to his terrible exhaustion, he seized his opportunity and killed the lions yoked to his chariot. Anger nerved the arms of Indrajit, and he regained his old vigour and ploughed the bodies of his enemies with his terrific arrows, and blew his sonorous conch to the trepidation of the Vanara host. Lakshmana again awaited his opportunity and, when it presented itself, he pursued his advantage and struck down Indrajit's strong armour and twanged his mighty bow. Rama was delighted to see his grand archery, and called the Vanara army standing at a distance to cheer him with their sphere-rending shouts.

[1] VI xxi 63, 66. [2] VI xxi 67.

Indrajit saw that Lakshmana was invincible by his ordinary weapons, and thought again to employ his magic. But waiting first to know what the brothers were thinking on their part, he rose into the sky, and becoming invisible approached near where they were standing. Lakshmana knew by the previous day's experience what his enemy was capable of, and so proposed to his brother that he should use the terrific *Brahmastra* and finish him and all Lanka. As soon as he heard these words, Indrajit flew amain to Lanka saying that, if they would attempt to use that world-shattering missile, he would forestall them and prepare it himself against them.

But here on the field, Rama replied to Lakshmana that if he used the missile in his anger it would destroy not only Indrajit but all the worlds besides, and that, therefore, he should not use it now and endanger the universe for the sake of one enemy. The Vanara host now returned to the field, and there was immense joy among them to see that the Rakshasa had fled away. Rama also went to the rear to make fresh sacrifices to the gods, by the strength of which sacrifices alone could the different divine weapons and missiles be used and parried with effect.

Indrajit, however, asked his father to send Mahodara with fresh troops to engage the enemy while he himself went to do the necessary sacrifices to the gods and obtain the power to send the *Brahmastra* against them. Mahodara, therefore, led his vast army into the field. But Hanuman now took the huge shape that he could at will and scattered and destroyed a wing of the Rakshasa force headed by Akamba. Sugriva and Angada joined in the melee and they attacked and destroyed or drove from the field other divisions of the enemy. But Mahodara with his magic powers checked the advancing Vanara troops, reformed his army, and then by feints at retreating drew the Vanara heroes and Lakshmana further south towards the walls of the city.

As all sound of battle died away in the distance, Rama, who was in the midst of his sacrifices for the divine weapons, became anxious to know what was happening, left the sacrificial grounds, and retracing his steps towards the battle-field followed the track of his army which was being drawn further and further south by the fascinating magic of Mahodara. Confusion reigned everywhere, and it was after hours of anxiety that Rama learned from Hanuman that unless he himself sent some missiles of divine power the Rakshasa magic could not be overcome. Rama bent his bow therefore and sent his darts instinct with the divine power of Shiva, and Mahodara, seeing that his magic refused to

stand against this class of weapons, rose up in the air and bided his time.

The field now being absolutely clear of the Rakshasa troops, Rama went back to the sacrificial ground to complete his sacrifices for the divine *astras.* But soon after, Indrajit returned having perfected his sacrifices and obtained the cruel missiles called *Brahmastra* that destroy whole masses at one fell throw. He had not the compunctions that prevented the brothers from using such a weapon, and so standing under the cover of the Illusion again produced by Mahodara he bent his bow, pronounced the *mantras* of the *Brahmastra* and released the dart. At once millions on millions of arrows flew with deadly force from inside that deadly dart, and killed the Vanara heroes by the myriad and even Lakshmana himself.

Having achieved his fell work, Indrajit went back in triumph to Lanka and proudly told his father that his enemies were now destroyed for ever, for, said he, 'would Rama, if living, forget his valour when I stretched his dearest friends and brother upon the field?'

When Rama came back to the field after finishing his sacrifices and renewing the power of his *astras,* he was stunned at the sight that met his eyes. Wherever he turned, he saw nothing but heaps of Vanara corpses. He saw his Sugriva and Hanuman, Angada and Nila, and the rest ploughed with bleeding wounds and fallen at the head of their respective divisions; and his tears fell like showers. But when he saw his Lakshmana also a lifeless corpse, he fell down plumb, like a *sala* tree struck by the thunderbolt.

And who was there to console him in that awful moment of soul-shattering grief? Who was there to separate him from the body of his brother which he was embracing with his trembling arms? And who was there to lift him up and bring him to himself? He was alone, all alone in that wilderness of the dead!

After hours of silent anguish in that weirdly dark night, Rama thus gave expression to the measureless grief that was agitating his mind:

'I died not when I heard of our father's death,
Though he a kingdom gave,[1] for in thy love
I learned to forget his loss: but, thee now dead,
What's life to me? I come, my brother, I come.

[1] Read: 'I died not though he a kingdom gave' (to me). The original allows also a rendering as 'I minded not when he gave away the kingdom.' (P)

But wert thou brother alone? Thou wert to me
A child and father, mother and blessings all:
And thou art gone! And thou art gone without
A 'Farewell' said. Alas! have I become
More cruel than thee? For I see thee dead
And still, pretending sorrow, I bear to live.
My heart is made of stone, it breaketh not;
E'en thy loss I shall bear and cling to life!
In all these fourteen years of forest life,
Through sun or shower, thou labouredst hard for me
And ne'er didst rest: art thou now gone for rest?
  Thou hadst forsworn e'en sleep: wouldst not awake?
Thy one desire, child, was to see me crowned:
Now ope thy eyes, behold, I'm grown home-sick;
Take me to Oudh and crown me with thy hands!
Ah wretch I am that knows not what is love
Though losing thee, my brother, I am not dead.
  Now who is brother to thee? Alas our bonds
Are broke: Nor I nor life are kin to thee! . . .
  My love of throne has untold misery brought
On father, mother and all. And for this love
Of Sita I have sacrificed thee . . . . . .
  Thou wert a brother born but grewest a friend
Inseparable, thou didst thy father leave
And mother and Dharm itself and followed'st me.
But do I follow thee now thou art dead? . . .
  Why did I part from thee, and let thee fight
Alone with Indrajit? I hate myself;
I hate this life inconstant: I come, I come!
Behold, I follow thee!'[1]

Thus lamenting, Rama once again fell into a swoon.

Rakshasa scouts now thought that Rama also was dead and ran to Lanka and informed Ravana that the whole Vanara army and the two men lay dead upon the field. Ravana was now triumphant and ordered that Sita should be taken over the battle-field and shown the corpse of her husband.

After Sita had come and gone, Vibhishana who had gone to look after the provisions of the army returned and saw the carnage and the dreadful silence over the whole field. Relieved to find that, though Rama could not be waked from his swoon, he had

1 VI xxi 206-209, 218, 210, 212, 214, 217.

no wounds on his body, and hoping that Lakshmana and the rest would escape from this *astra* even as they did from the *Naga pasha*, he searched the field torch in hand to see if any of the great heroes were living, so that he might consult with them as to what they should do in this great disaster. He at last saw Hanuman with his body drilled with the terrific shafts of Indrajit but with life not extinct ; and then, removing the darts from his body and cooling him with fresh water from the clouds, he brought him back to consciousness. Hanuman now rose with Rama's name upon his lips, saw with grief the shambles that their army was, and asked if Jambhavan was yet alive as he alone could suggest a remedy in that great hour. Jambhavan was searched for and fortunately found alive. On being asked, he said that on the Sanjivi hill grew the drugs that could heal all wounds and bring the dead back to life, and that Hanuman should fly thither and bring the drugs, and with their aid restore to life the fallen army.

So Hanuman flew through the air the thousands of miles lying between Lanka and the hill, lifted the hill sheer with his hands and flew back to Lanka before the day broke. As soon as the hill of drugs was brought, the very air at once wafted balsam, and the Vanara heroes and Lakshmana rose as if from sleep with all their wounds healed and fresher than ever before.[1]

Lakshmana had now escaped from two disasters. Although he fought with a valour equal to that of his enemy, the latter's magic powers and unscrupulousness were able to wrest victory out of defeat. The challenges that he had thrown out to Indrajit were yet unfulfilled, and it was by miracles that he himself escaped with life. These two miracles, however, showed that the gods were on his side and that he would end by destroying the Rakshasa. But how great fights had again to be waged, through what great fire he had again and again to pass before he was able to bring the head of Indrajit to the ground !

1 As the Rakshasa dead had been thrown into the sea at the command of Ravana, the balmy air was of no use for them.

CHAPTER VIII

INDRAJIT: HIS EXPLOITS AND DEATH

While describing Lakshmana's exploits in the last chapter, we had inevitably to speak of Indrajit, the ablest fighter in the Rakshasa army. In this chapter we shall study his character as Kamban depicts him and describe his last great fights with Lakshmana whom he had chosen as his especial opponent.

We have already referred to Hanuman's estimate[1] of his valour even when he was asleep. He is the only Rakshasa who dares to use hard words to Ravana. For, when he hears that Hanuman, during his first visit to Lanka, after discovering Sita had destroyed Rakshasa army after Rakshasa army that were sent against him, and also had killed his brother Aksha who had commanded the last army, he rushes to the presence of his father and chides him saying,

> 'Thou weighest not the danger beforehand but rushest unthinking into it, and then thou sufferest. Even after seeing the prowess of that monkey, thou hast sent against him in batches those who could never hold their own against him. Is it not then thou that hast killed them? When the *Kinkaras* and Jambumali and the five commandants with their goodly force returned not with life from the fight, how can we call our enemy monkey? Ought we not rather to rank him with Shiva and Brahma and Vishnu? Thou hast in the days past broken the force of the Elephants that hold the universe in its place, and conquered the three worlds and lifted mount Kailasa itself with Shiva upon it. But now what will wash this humiliation received at the hands of the monkey who has killed our Aksha? After this, even a victory will not be a matter for rejoicing!'[2]

So also, when his father tells him that Atikaya was killed in the battle with Lakshmana, he boldly attacks him saying,

> 'Is't Lakshman killed my brother? No! 'tis thou
> That sent him to the slaughter. Knowing their might
> Why sent'st thou not for me before? The foe
> That killed my other brother thou sent'st away

[1] *See* page 83. [2] V xii 9-11.

Unthinking, for, sooth, he as an envoy came.
And now where are thy sons to guard thy throne?
Past are thy days of glory, Sire!'[1]

But though he chides his father to his face, he is extremely jealous of his father's glory. For instance, when he learns that Hanuman had ended Aksha he exclaims,

'Alas, 'tis not my brother that is dead—
It is my father's glory faded lies
Upon the ground.'[2]

When, on reaching the battle-field he sees the ground soaked with the blood of Rakshasas killed by Hanuman, he is filled with shame that Rakshasa blood should be spilled in Lanka by a monkey. Says the poet,

He saw his comrades dear to him as life
Or th' apple of his eye, all fallen dead
Upon the ground, and endless phalanx fierce.
He saw the shambles they had become, and at
The sight he bit his lip; and who could sound
The grief and shame that agitated him?
A stick that probes a bleeding wound does give
A lighter pang.[3]

When, at the Rakshasa council, Ravana speaks of heading an army himself against Rama, Indrajit considers that he should never think of doing a thing that is so much beneath his dignity and asks him to send himself. He says, sarcastically,

'And thou to march against this puny man!
O great will be the glory thou wilt reap,
And great the triumph in that noble war!
Ver'ly thou dost despise the Rakshasas
That bear the arms divine, now rusty grown,
That Mahadeva gave and Brahma blessed;
And I am grown the least before thine eyes
Of those that wield the sword!'[4]

[1] VI xviii 7, 8.
[2] V xii 5.
[3] V xii 18.
[4] VI ii 58, 59.

And then changing the mood he continues,

> 'Even if all the worlds conspire 'gainst thee
> And range their powers upon the field, I'll brave
> Them all and bring thee victory. If I fail,
> I'll brag not myself son to thee, but deem
> Myself a low-born craven. . . . Thou wilt see
> The Vanars lick the dust, and Mother Earth
> Groan with the weight of rolling heads: and I
> Shall torture Sita with the blood-curdling sight
> Of Lakshman's gory head and Ram's.' [1]

We have given the reader, we hope, in the last chapter an adequate idea of his superb valour. Kamban calls him the 'perfection of all valorous qualities'. He leaps with joy when he finds a brave and mighty enemy to fight with. Thus, during Hanuman's first visit to Lanka,

> Though he had conquered worlds before,
> The mighty form of Hanuman when he saw,
> And the field heaped up with masses of the dead,
> 'Here is a foe that's worthy of my steel,'
> He thought, and was delighted at his luck
> In having such a foe to fight.[2]

The gods and the whole world live in perpetual terror of his valour. As an instance, when he marches to punish Hanuman after the death of Aksha,

> Now thundered loud the trumpets and the bells
> Jingling on warriors' anklets proud. The king
> Of gods did tremble for his very life.
> Even the Three Supreme from *Yoga* turned
> Expecting fierce war.[3]

The Devas' fear of him, however, was as much due to his magic arts as to his valour. For he was an expert in the employment of the black art as in the wielding of the weapons of war. So much so, that anybody who displays an extraordinary cunning is dubbed at once in India as Indrajit. We have seen him, in the last chapter, resorting to the *Naga pasha* and

[1] VI ii 60, 61. [2] V xii 15. [3] V xii 4.

Brahmastra after concealing himself from human sight. We shall presently see him try to throw Rama off his guard by another of his magic tricks and by false threats uttered before Rama's faithfullest servant Hanuman.

For, when he found that Rama was not touched even by his *Brahmastra* which brought down the whole of the Vanara army, his hopes of final victory by pure deeds of valour began to grow dim, and he spoke to his father, disclosing his plans for the third day's fight, prefacing his speech by his opinion of Rama :

'Man he is not, nor Indra, ancient foe,
Nor Rishi striving after Brahmagnan[1]
I doubt not now that he's the Ancient One
Adored by all, as Vibhishana held forth,
But not for that shall we our strivings cease :
Though fallen are our heroes great there's hope
Of victory yet for us : if I but go
To the field of Nikumbhal and undisturbed
I can perform my magic rites, I win
The power to conquer even him.'[2]

And then he explains how he proposes to put the man and the Vanaras on the wrong scent :

'By magic art I'll make a breathing shape
Like unto Janaki, and sever its head
In sight of Hanuman, and straight proclaim
I fly to Oudh, and for revenge destroy
The city and its king. Despair will seize
The Vanar army and the Man and they
Will either leave this land or send to Oudh
The mighty Hanuman and suspend war
Till he return. Meantime my rites complete,
I fall on them with mortal weapons new,
And bring thee triumph sure.'[3]

Ravana agreed to this and Indrajit went his way to make the living automaton.

Meantime, the Vanara army that was restored to life by the hill of drugs determined to set fire to Lanka, and set about to throw burning tinder and torches into the interior of the city.

[1] Knowledge of the Ultimate Reality.
[2] VI xxv 13, 14. [3] VI xxv 16-18.

Hanuman who had gone north to restore the Sanjivi hill to its place returned to Lanka and joined in the work. As, however, he approached the western gate of the city, Indrajit appeared before him sword in hand, dragging by the hair the automaton made like Sita, and said,

> 'It is for Sita ye are making war :
> My father careth not for her, and lo
> I spill her blood e'en 'fore your eyes !'[1]

Hanuman knew not his trick and was taken aback. He knew not what to do. In his confusion he thought a soft word might save Sita and so he prayed to Indrajit to release her. He therefore addressed him in these words :

> 'O worthy son of a worthy race (thou art
> The fifth in direct line from Brahma great)
> Kill not a woman, shame not thy ancient line !
> Thou hast the *shasters* mastered and the Ved :
> Knowest thou not 'tis a crime and also shame
> To fell a woman dead ? Behold, the Earth
> Doth tremble at the sight and heaven above
> And yet thou pity'st not ! O spare the fair !
> If thou deliver her to me, I'll pray
> That all the worlds may own thee king for ever.
> Alas, forgettest thou the glory great
> Of thy race ? Disgrace not thou its ancient name !'[2]

Indrajit only laughed at Hanuman and replied,

> 'Well hast thou said ! We'll purchase safety, sooth,
> Me and my father, by delivering Sita !
> And great will be the glory thereby reaped !
> No, I will kill her straight and send my shafts
> That'll make you flee for life, and 'stablish firm
> My father's throne—But all I have not said :
> For I shall first to Oudh and burn her walls ;
> Guard her if e'er ye can ! Behold I speed
> Thither : Nor gods can save thy master's mothers
> Or brothers. Behold, my flaming arrows fly !
> Already, hark, their death-groans rend the air !'[3]

1 VI xxv 31. 2 VI xxv 34, 35.
3 VI xxv 38-41.

So saying, while still the automaton was piteously praying for life, he drew his sword and with one stroke severed the head from its body and directed his charioteer to steer his aerial car northward.

Hanuman fell where he stood, stunned, even like a mountain torn by its roots. The poet describes his grief and lament for Sita's fate in these words:

'O swan!' he would cry out, and sob; and then
Would cry, 'O jewel of womankind!' He would
Then call aloud, 'O mother mine;' then groan,
Asking in deep despair, 'Is there no god?'
And then would curse his heart that it did not
In pieces break when she was killed before
His eyes.

He thought of springing on his foe,
But lacking force he fell upon the ground
And groaned. His eyes did flash with rage. His frame
Did shiver for the anguish of his heart;
And knocking his huge head against the ground
He thus lamented loud: 'I thought the night
Which did the three worlds envelop had passed,
And dawn was nigh; alas, the thrice black pall
Of Misery has fallen once again
Upon the Earth, and she submerged groans
Beneath the flood of sin. For the cruel foe
Has felled down Sita, and Dharma mangled lies!'

"The foe does kill that lovely princess pure,
I see her killed—a woman killed before
My eyes!—and yet I stand transfixed to the spot
E'en like a bird that has its wings lopped off!
O bravely have I from captivity
Rescued her! Maithili, my Rama's spouse,
That mother of unsurpassed austerities,
That spotless daughter of a spotless race,
A helpless one—her he has cleaved in twain,
And I have let him go: and now I weep
As if I have a heart that compassion feels!
I braved the dangers of the deep, O mother,
And carried Rama's message here, and thine
O'er there, not for to end this curs'd race
Nor for to force thee from their hands: I came

Alone to see thee killed before thy time!
And men would curse my name for e'er. When Ram
Did wander in his grief o'er hills and dales
Like one distraught, I had the fortune great
To rouse him back to life with the words, 'I saw
Thy love, I saw her still alive'. And now
Am I to say, 'I saw the Rakshasa kill
Thy spotless wife?' Ah, wretched is my fate!"
"I was proud I could the ocean cross, and bridge
Th' abyss unbridged, and carry off the hill
Of drugs and aye bring back the dead to life.
And I to myself boasted, 'There is none
Among the Vanars like thee'. Alas,
All my exploits are now no more than scent
Dissolved in ocean stream. I dared not spring
Upon the murderous foe and mangle him
To death; I died not straightway rending my frame
In twain; but saw him kill her undisturbed.
And still I'll live to fatten this body mine
With food: is then my glory small?"[1]

After this lament Hanuman came to himself sufficiently to enable him to run to Rama and inform him that he saw Indrajit kill Sita. When Rama heard the words he was stunned:

there was no shudder in his frame; he did not breathe heavily; his eyes did not move, nor tears came from them; he spoke not a word; burst not his heart; he did not fall to the ground; he did not sob; there was no sweat showing over his body—the gods even were not able to sound the depth of the anguish in his heart![2]

The Vanara heroes who heard the news fell as uprooted rocks at the feet of Rama. But Rama,

who was unmoved even as a statue, looked not at the faces of his friends; he would not even reply to Lakshmana's questions; he lost control over himself; and with his heart carved and cut by the scalpel of deep attachment to Sita, he fell down on the ground even as a man dead.[3]

Lakshmana could not bear to see Rama tortured with such grief. He felt that all their endeavours had come to nought with the tragic end of Sita. Especially could he not bear the shame

[1] VI xxv 45-53. [2] VI xxv 58.
[3] VI xxv 60.

that they were unable to prevent such a fate from befalling the woman whom he looked upon as his own mother. 'And he also sank down in grief like a calf that has lost its mother'.

At length, Vibhishana brought Rama back to consciousness, but Rama was still too full of sorrow. Lakshmana too, soon after, came to himself; and, though full of anguish himself and sinking under the weight of such a terrible disaster, he felt that owing to the attachment of Rama to Sita, Rama's heart would break endangering even his life, and so he addressed to Rama these trumpet-like words:

'When Fate her darkest hour unrolls, and all
Appears lost, 'tis only weaklings lose
Their heart and hopeless sink in black despair.
But wilt thou be like them? When tarnished is
Our race itself by this irreparable loss,
Why slacks thy arm from ending all the worlds
And Dharma's self at one fell stroke? Here was
A woman weak, a helpless one, of life
Austere, and she thy spouse, as Lakshmi fair:
If her the Rakshas kills and thou art still
Engulfed in sorrow, thy rage unroused, I ask,
Is life so dear? Or dost thou pity feel
For men and gods? What hast thou now to do
With Dharm itself? What care we now for gods
Or Rakshasas, for Gurus, Brahmans, Ved
Itself? When violence prospers in the world
And Righteousness in ruin ends, why sit
We here with folded arms? Why hesitate
To end the triple worlds with fire and sword?
Behold, the worlds are still revolving on
In their appointed spheres; the gods are still
Alive; and men are bowing yet to Dharm
As if it still exists! And clouds yet yield
Their plenteous rain to man! And bent with grief
We sit and weep and rise not to end them all!
Is not our valour great?
Our duty was
If we but knew, to burn this city vile,
And scattering fire around, to line with flames
The roads, all through, that Indrajitta passed,
And send him to his doom. This unattempted,
If impotent we sit with indolent arms,

And water with our tears the earth, will not
Our manliness look small? At Ayodh too,
We feared this Dharma, and renounced our throne
And wandering in the forests wild, we lost
Our Sita, tricked by villainous Ravana's guile;
And yet we kept our wraths within our bounds.
Here also to this outrage fell if we
Should submit meek, what doubt but he will bind us
In chains and bid us slave for him? Should we
Desperate, die by our own hands, the world
Will laugh at us and say we lacked the strength
A helpless woman's murder to avenge
And died consumed with shame. Yield not, therefore,
My brother to this unmanly, weak despair,
The portion of the feeble in mind and heart.'[1]

Sugriva was fired with these words, and rose to spring on Lanka. But Hanuman told the company, what he had forgotten to say before, that Indrajit had threatened to march on Ayodhya and that he had seen the Rakshasa direct his aerial car northwards. Rama's anxiety for the fate of his brothers and mothers at Ayodhya was even greater than his grief for the loss of Sita. After a moment's agitation he thought of pursuing the Rakshasa on the shoulders of Hanuman. But Lakshmana heartened Rama by reminding him of Bharata's valour while Vibhishana proposed that, as he doubted that Indrajit might have played some trick of illusion, he should first go to *Ashokavana* disguised and see if Sita was alive. This proposal was immediately agreed to, and Vibhishana soon returned with the happy news that Sita was still alive and unharmed. He also further brought the information that Indrajit had gone to the field of Nikumbhala to perform a sacrifice, and proposed that Rama should send Lakshmana immediately to attack him there and prevent the completion of the sacrifice, as it had been foretold to Indrajit that if he completed this sacrifice at Nikumbhala he would be able to destroy his enemies, no matter who they might be, without fail. Rama agreed to it, gave Lakshmana the great bow of Vishnu surrendered to him by Parshu Rama, and after telling him with what weapons to parry the Rakshasa's divine weapons and enjoining him not to use the *Brahmastra* even if the enemy should use it, sent him to the fight with his blessings.

1 VI xxv 65-71.

At Nikumbhala Indrajit was at his sacrifice invoking the gods for invincibility and final victory. The sacrificial ground was guarded on all sides by the Rakshasa army standing silent in circular formation called the *Chakravyuha.* Lakshmana and his host now came to interrupt the *Yajna* and the battle began.

The Rakshasas met the challenging shouts of the Vanaras with their counter-challenges, and their rocks and tree-trunks by their arrows and maces and clubs and lances. The Vanaras and the Rakshasas fell by the thousand, and the sacrifice was interrupted. The limbs and trunks of the dead Rakshasas fell on and desecrated the sacrificial fire. Their heads fell on the pots of the sacrificial water and broke them in pieces. The blood of the Rakshasas flowed in streams and extinguished the fire in the chief sacrificial pit. The sacrificial buffaloes were killed by the swords and lances still grasped by the torn and falling arms of Indrajit's loyal soldiers. Lakshmana's arrows destroyed the Rakshasa army 'like the whirlwind, like the engineering art of the Kalingas[1], like an epidemic of disease, like acid thrown in milk.'

Wherever Indrajit turned his eyes he could see only the heaped up carcasses of elephants and heroes, the broken fragments of chariots, the heads of his valorous soldiers, and a sea of blood. He could not see the bodies of his heroes—he could see only streams of blood issuing from the fragments of their mighty limbs. He saw the rest of his troops flying for life everywhere and dying or dead or crouching with terror in their flight. And so he stopped his invocations, and rose like a smoke-topped pyramid of flame—about to be quenched. He thought that the extinguishing of the sacrificial fire foreboded his own end. But like a true son of battle he feared not but prepared to meet Lakshmana and the Vanara army.

Hanuman now came within his earshot, and taunted him with these words :

'O Rakshas of a hundred million lies ;
I ween I saw thee kill our Janaki
And fly to Oudh ? When didst thou thence return,
My warrior bold ? I hope success has smiled
On thee ! I hope thou hast that city fair

1 Read : 'military engineering art'. Aiyar here renders the original phrase '*Kalinga-K-Kammiar noolena*' in a sense more apposite to the other terms denoting forces of destruction than the more commonly accepted meaning of 'the yarn of the workers on (the) cloth (loom)' which is inappropriate as it refers to the frequent and easy snapping of the yarn and is therefore the thing destroyed.' (P)

Uprooted, and Rama's race destroyed! I hope
Thou hast thy bow-craft shown to saintly Bharat,
Strong as the mighty Shesh that bears aloft
The spacious earth and all that is thereon!
I hope thou hast his youngest brother met
In battle face to face and conquered him!
I would not be surprised if e'en their heads
Thou hast as trophies brought. Knowest thou perchance
That now thy circling battle-front is pierced?
Hath twang of Lakshman's battling bow by chance
Entered thine ear? . . . Is it the noose to-day
That thou wilt wield, or Brahma's fatal dart?
'Sit dart of Mahadev or Vishnu's disk
Thou dost purpose to hurl? We die with fear,
O mighty sire, of all thy armoury! . . .
E'en if Maheshvar comes to save thy life,
Or Vishnu from His Sea, thy doom is fixed
Today. I see the tremor ominous
On the wrong side of thy frame: stay'st thou to fight
This day? Behold the hero challenging
Who's sworn to take thy life; the thundering twang
Of his strong bow, I crave to know, is it
An indispensable part of sacrifice?
The Gods are come to see him wield the bow
The supreme archer, brother to mighty Ram.
Death comes to every man one day—so why
Dost hesitate?'[1]

Though Indrajit now saw that he could not contend against Lakshmana, his hauteur did not abate an inch, and he flung these words at Hanuman:

'Well hast thou learnt my words from me, and now
Forestall'st me well! And ye to taunt me thus!
Where is the fight, in all our battles fought,
In which ye were not crushed? With life restored
Ye forget clean your enemy's death-winged shafts!
Again ye thirst for death and challenge me:
Have you preserved the drug that saves from death?
Let Lakshman come or Ram, let those that feel
They can now come to guard ye from my darts!

1 VI xxvi 70-78.

The gods will only see the carcasses
Of Vanaras dead heaped up upon the field,
And anguish of their human masters feeble!
Long as I have my brawny arms and bow
I let no foe return alive—or man
Or hunch-backed ape. E'en if ye refuge take
In heaven, I will pursue ye even there
And end ye all: and e'en Sanjivi Hill
Cannot restore ye back to life! Because
My sacrifice is interrupt, dream not
Therefore that victory will now be yours,
Nor brag in imitated speech of prowess
That 'll ne'er be yours. I waste my words no more:
The darts that one by one will cleave your necks
And drop your heads upon the blood-red sward
Will blazon forth my might to all the worlds.
I am not skilled like ye in the boaster's art,
But this I'll say: thrice have ye bit the dust
'Fore me. Have ever ye stood your ground to face
Me in my rage? And now at least have ye
To face me trained yourselves? Or will ye fall
Upon the field and stretch yourselves in death?
Or will ye flee from here for life?'[1]

So saying Indrajit blew his war-conch and twanged his bow. At the mere sound the common Vanaras threw down the stones and tree-trunks in their hands and ran for their lives. The leaders, however, stood their ground and gave him battle. Hanuman took a giant rock and hurled it with such a force that even his father, the God of Wind, trembled with fear. And the gods said, 'what is too heavy for such brawny arms?' The rock flew with the force of a thousand thunderbolts, and the worlds trembled at it, and the Rakshasa host fled in terror. But Indrajit laughed, and saying,

'Well done, my Vanar brave! Thou hop'st with stones
To throw me down and kill me 'fore the gods.
Perhaps a monkey can this feat!'[2]

sent a forceful shaft against that rock and blew it into fragments; but even the unwinking gods did not see when or how he aimed

[1] VI xxvi 80 to 85. [2] VI xxvi 91.

his arrow. As Hanuman was lifting another rock Indrajit sent a score of arrows against him and struck him down senseless.

Sugriva now took his place. But Indrajit despised his strength and said,

> ' E'en though they rush on him with scowling eye,
> Does e'er the lion turn from elephant chase,
> And stop to war with chattering monkeys vile ?
> Go, bring me Lakshman who may stand some fight
> And give my darts some work : fall not a prey
> To their deadly point. Saw'st not thy Hanuman
> Felled down ? Art thou more strong ? Hold I not still
> My mighty bow ? Has ever my right hand failed
> Me up to now ? Hast thou forgot thy lesson
> Of yesterday ? Or hast thou gained new strength ?
> Show me the man, and flee with all thy host
> To thy native hills ! '[1]

So saying, he turned towards where Lakshmana stood, but the Vanara heroes rained on him rocks and stones, and received his arrows on their limbs. Great was the havoc that the Rakshasa's arrows played upon the Vanara army, and Vibhishana prayed to Lakshmana to check his course. Hanuman had now recovered from his shock, and taking Lakshmana upon his shoulders strode to the front and stood facing Indrajit's chariot. And though the chariot was drawn by a thousand horses, neither in appearance nor in fact did the advantage rest with the Rakshasa —so mighty and so swift was the great Vanara. Lakshmana's arrows rushed through the air like fire, like thunderbolts, like ghouls searching for living prey, like famine, like epidemic disease, like the fruits of the sins of man when they return home to him in their season, like molten metal, like vultures sweeping over their prey for the sake of their living. But, for every arrow the Rakshasa had a counter, and he sped his arrows in such multitude that Vanaras wondered whether the world could contain any more of them. Indrajit's chariot made its evolutions over hill and dale, mound and plain, to catch Lakshmana at a disadvantage, but Hanuman was as swift as the war-horses of Indrajit, and he never for a single moment exposed Lakshmana's unguarded side to the enemy. Such was the swiftness of their evolutions that even tried warriors could not tell which was Lakshmana and which the Rakshasa. The gods were glad that they were given

1 VI xxvi 98, 99.

to see such a fight as never was fought before. The combatants looked like two *avatars* of Durga—the war-goddess—striving against each other. The arrows clove the air with such swiftness that they were right who said, 'behold, the arrows fly the air', and those also were right who said 'no, arrows cleave the air.' The gashes in the bodies of the combatants alone showed that the arrows had left the bow-strings—so rapid was their flight. Far as the eye could reach, the sky was overcast with flames and smoke. The very stars became cinder in that iron-hail. The twang of the bow-strings rent the air like thunder. There was explosion everywhere. The raging darts beaked each other. The seas dried up, the hills crumbled to pieces, the trees caught fire, the bodies of the combatants were crumpled up in the fire of the burning arrows.

At length the armour of Indrajit was torn open and his body was pierced by Lakshmana's arrows. But he did not mind this and sent his darts which wounded Hanuman all over. Seeing Hanuman wounded, Lakshmana got down and aimed at the Rakshasa's chariot and sent it into a thousand fragments. Indrajit now wounded and stunned Lakshmana with ten arrows rapidly fired. But the latter at once recovered and pierced the enemy's chest and arms with arrows that flew with the force of Shiva's foot when he kicked Death in order to save Markandeya. Then Indrajit drew out his divine weapons one after another, but Lakshmana was able to parry them all by similar ones. At length, seeing no other way, he sent the *Brahmastra* against Lakshmana. The gods trembled and prayed for his life. But, though it was against the injunction of his brother, Lakshmana sent the *Brahmastra* himself to parry his enemy's weapon, and showed to him that it was not for his ignorance of its use that he desisted from using it during the second battle. Indrajit's *Brahmastra* was destroyed by Lakshmana's which in addition threatened to consume the whole world. But Lakshmana aimed another missile at his own *Brahmastra*, and made it innocuous; and the gods exclaimed, 'what is there that is impossible to men of heroic mould.'

Indrajit now thought that perhaps the *Narayanastra* may finish Lakshmana, and so, saying,

> 'If thou can parry this, none can oppose
> Thee on the field. But this will send thee sure
> To heaven—I know it cannot fail,'[1]

[1] VI xxvi 146.

he aimed it at Lakshmana with all his might. It came like a roaring fire, and Lakshmana, knowing that it could not be opposed by any other divine weapon, meditated on Narayana, its presiding deity and faced it ; and lo, it turned aside, went round Lakshmana, and gathering its force into itself evaporated in smoke, harmless.

Indrajit wondered at the miracle and once more doubted that Lakshmana might be the great Narayana himself. But checking his thought, and saying, 'It does not matter who he is, I will fight him to the end,' he invoked the *Maheshvara-astra* and sent it flaming through the air. It came filling the vault of the sky and exploding from its body lances and axes, red-hot arrows and living fire, poisons and cobras and thunderbolts, the grisly shapes of death, and black ghouls and giant demons.

The world-consuming fire now issued from
Its loins, and now the whirlwind sweeping clean
The earth and all that lives on Judgement Day.
And now the waters of the seas beyond
The seven did issue forth from its entrails.
The sky it darkened as with outer darkness.
The gods in terror fled, and Rishis left
With whitened face the field : The Vanar host
Sank in despair upon the ground ; and moon
And sun and all the worlds their orbits swerved
In fear ! Vibhishan trembled at the sight
And called the holy name aloud of Ram,
But lion-like Lakshman only smiled. 'Fear not',
He said to those who ran to him in fear :
'Fear not, trust in my valour, ye are saved.'
He said, and straight invoked the Infinite One
On whom Shiv himself meditates, and sped
His dart with unsurpassed force. And lo,
It shattered in the air th' exploding dart
Of Ravan's mighty son. It did no more,
For Lakshman in his mercy did command
That it should spend itself when was destroyed
Its deadly target. The heavens did shout for joy
And earth ; the seas and clouds the chorus joined ;
And Dharm and Wisdom cried out, 'Victory !'
But where's the wonder when Jayalakshmi's[1] self
Did leap for joy ?[2]

1 The Goddess of Victory. 2 VI xxvi 156-160.

Indrajit now came to think that one who could break the force even of these *astras* with such supreme skill should be very God. But he slacked not in his duty to his king. Even while Lakshmana was aiming at the *Maheshvara-astra,* leaving Indrajit free for the moment, the latter took advantage of the respite, and rained his terrific darts upon him and the Vanara leaders.

But, just then, Vibhishana showed himself before him, and when Indrajit saw him actually in the act of aiding and advising his enemy, his indignation grew to white heat, and he burst out in the following words :

'Thou traitor base that hast thy duty broke,
And beggar-wise dost cringe before a man,
Echoing like a drum his every word !
Think'st thou I'll spare thy miscreant head to-day,
Because, forsooth, thou art my father's brother ?
Though, all our leaders dead, the sovereignty
Of earth and heaven be slipping from our hands,
We yet can bear our breasts to our foeman's darts :
But can we think of life distained with shame ?
As fish that leave not streams though water fails
The Rakshas race will leave not Ravan's side
But die with him : the earth alone will rest
And thou with it ; but who will own thee king ?

''Tis not thy valour helped my father great
(Who lifted sheer the hill that Shiva guards)
To conquer Brahm and wield the sceptre proud
Of the varied world. Thou mayest rule, when we
Are dead, over Brahma's race, by gods adored,
Thyself a slave to man ! What carest thou
For glory ? Ends it not with us ? Ah no !
Is not thy glory great ? For hast thou not
Our secrets to the foes betrayed who maimed
Thy sister ? Helpest not the men to kill
Thy brother and me and all the Rakshas race ? . . .

'And on the day that Ravan's mighty frame
Shall fall by Rama's darts on the dusty field,
Wilt thou, O valorous prince, his blood-stained limb
Embrace and roll upon the ground in grief ?
Or wilt thou join the victors in their shouts
Triumphal ? Or wilt fall at Rama's feet

And cringe for favours, blessing him? I thirst
To know thy mind, my noble uncle brave!'[1]

Vibhishana justified himself for having left a brother who carried off a chaste wife from her husband and persistently refused to restore her back to him. And he closed his justification by saying,

'I know that Sin can never overcome
Virtue: I've taken refuge in Shri Ram
The God of Gods; let glory come to me
Or shame; let evil come to me or good:
I am content.'[2]

But Indrajit bent his bow, and saying,

'Alas! thy dreams of glory and of good,
O uncle, will dissolve, the moment dire
My barbed arrows pierce thy traitorous breast,'[3]

aimed a deadly dart against him. But Lakshmana cut it off in mid-air and saved Vibhishana. Indrajit now poised a lance and sent it against his uncle's chest, but it was parried and broken in its flight by Lakshmana's arrows. Vibhishana's anger was now roused, and taking his mace in hand he attacked Indrajit. Indrajit's charioteer was killed, and the horses were either killed or dispersed. But Indrajit was not hurt. He, on his part, however, sent a shower of arrows against him, and shouting a shout that sent the spheres in shivers disappeared in the clouds.

Indrajit had done all that he could to bring victory to his father. Young, brave, full of resource, and proud of the great record of his past achievements, he entered upon the war full of hope. He knew, of course, the valour of his enemies. But their courage and strength only gladdened him. For, their greatness would give a lustre to his victory while their feebleness would only have brought a paltry success. The first battle, however, proved to him that Lakshmana was not an ordinary fighter. He conquered him only with the divine weapon of the Serpent-noose. When Lakshmana escaped miraculously and stood to give further battle, he wondered but did not despair of defeating him. He made more elaborate preparations, but his words to his father

1 VI xxvi 164-170. 2 VI xxvi 177. 3 VI xxvi 178.

have the true ring of the warrior who believes that he holds the key to ultimate victory. But when he found that this success was also only temporary, and that his enemies were able to resuscitate even the dead, his hopes fell. His belief in the sufficiency of the strength that he already possessed was gone, and he, therefore, desired to make new sacrifices to the gods and obtain the gifts of invincibility and ultimate success in battle. The reader has seen how his sacrifice was an utter failure. The only resource in which he put his faith being gone, his third entry into the field was characterised by hopelessness. But even when he has lost his hope, his nerves are firm, and he displays all his resources and all his skill. His words are still in the high key. His withering taunt of his uncle does not lack anything of his customary bravado. But the poet ably brings out in that speech the despair that has now entered his heart. His words are brave, but he has begun to envisage the defeat and death of himself and his father. And when he flies over to the audience-hall of Ravana, direct from the field of battle at Nikumbhala, his looks betray his defeat and despair to his father.

Ravana saw for the first time in his life the scared look of despair on the face of his son. And he thus addressed him:

'The barbed darts still fixed in thy chest
Announce the failure of thy sacrifice;
Thy more than adamant frame doth tremble like
A plantling twig: and thou hast the stricken look
Of cobras when they sight the eagle swoop
On them. So, son, now tell me what has passed.'[1]

Indrajit replied with bitterness and humility in these words:

'Thy brother has betrayed my secrets, Sire,
To the foe who has my sacrifices spoiled,
And broke the force of all my darts divine. . . .
If weapon blessed of Him who made the heavens
And earth doth bow to him and turn aside
Harmless, what can our other arms effect?
Our race has sinned, or such a subtle foe
Arises not for us. If Lakshman frowns,
I fear he can the three worlds blow to dust.

[1] VI xxvii 2.

The brothers from using Brahma's dart refrained
In battles past, because, I ween, they feared
'T would hurt the peopled worlds ; and so I won.
But now they've parried clean my heaviest arms,
And having tasted our unconquered might
They stand resolved to finish all our race !
Think not therefore, my liege, that I am seized
With fear : I speak for love of thee : If thou
Will conquer thy desire for Rama's spouse
And her release, they will forgive our sins,
And go from hence.'[1]

It is not a weakling who spoke these words. For Kamban adds,

So said the Rakshasa
Whose arms had to their centre shook the worlds ![2]

When Ravana heard these words, his heart brimmed over with contempt and anger. His pride was up. The mere thought of somebody forgiving him was poison to him. And with his reason-submerging passion for Sita still possessing his mind, how could he, with patience, listen to the words asking him to conquer his desire for Rama's spouse ? And so,

The king of Lanka laughed, and with stinging words
He thus addressed his son : 'I ween thou art,
My son, now unfit grown for war ; I see
Confusion in thy mind ; fear not the race
Of men, and worry thou no more. This day
I'll take the field with only bow in hand,
With none to guard my side, and I'll bring
Thee victory ! Think not I counted on
The Rākshasas who are already fallen :
Think not that I did count on those who're yet
Alive : think not I hoped that thou wouldst beat
My foes upon the field : in my sole right arm
I placed my trust, and I provoked this war !
Thou talkest like a child, my son : this life,
Transient as the bubble in the stream,
I may e'en in the sight of beaten gods
Forfeit upon the field, for then 't will shine

1 VI xxvii 3-6. 2 VI xxvii 6.

With glory's halo that will never dim :
But her, can I renounce, I twenty-armed ?
E'en if I lose, if Rama's name will stand,
My name, will not it also last as long
As Veds are sung on earth ? We live to-day,
To-morrow finds us not : but glory, doth
It ever die ? Let it be known for once
That I have Sita sent away, would not
The gods besiege my Lanka ? Die, I may ;
But can I stoop to shame and littleness—
E'en I who am the terror of the heavens
And earth ? What more ? thou mayest go to thy home
And, from thy chest the infinite barbs removed,
Lay down upon thy bed and sleep in peace !'
He said, and turning on the instant towards
Th' attendant heralds like a tiger roused,
He thundered, 'Order forth my battle-car.'[1]

As the reader will remember, Indrajit was cowed down. The days in which he could upbraid his father were now over. He fell at his feet pathetically saying,

'Pardon, my liege, the boldness of my words :
At least when I am gone, may thine eyes see
The good,'[2]

and made his preparations to go to the field for the last time.

He took with him the great weapons that the gods had surrendered to him after their defeat at his hands, and after giving away as gifts all that he had about him to the poor and needy who desired the same of him, he left the presence of his father. Even as he was going, he would glance at his father at every step, and tears would fill his eyes every time that he glanced.

And as he went the Rakshasa heroes flocked
To him, and weeping said, 'we cannot stay
While thus thou part'st ; we'll follow thee and die
E'en by thy side.' But he their ardour checked,
And saying, 'Range yourselves around our king
And liege ; I'll beat them even yet, fear not !'
He went alone.[3]

[1] VI xxvii 7 to 12. [2] VI xxvii 13. [3] VI xxvii 15.

As he passes along the street towards where his chariot was awaiting him, the Rakshasa beauties look at him with varying emotions :

> Some bowed to him ; some blessed him in their heart ;
> Some trembled for his life ; some sobbed to see
> Him part ; his lordly walk did fascinate
> Some fair ones ; others melted longing for
> His love and soft embrace.[1]

In the meantime Lakshmana and the Vanara heroes were wondering where their foe had gone, and what he intended doing. They had seen too much of his powers before, to leave the field boasting of victory. They therefore waited. At length they heard the thundering roar of the car majestically moving towards them in the distance. The sheen of its gold plates and gems and jingling bells pierced the gloom of night, making it look like a column of moving fire or some vast *aurora borealis*. It was the matchless, unique car which had ranged the heavens and earth and brought victory after victory to the Rakshasa arms. The seas boiled ; the hills shook ; the elephants that bore the heavens aloft fled in terror ; the earth was scarred with deep gashes ; dust covered the earth and sky and made the darkness more dark—such was the force with which that grand chariot rolled on towards the battle-field. But even that double darkness was ever and anon pierced by the dazzling brilliance of its gold and gems, and made the hooded snakes shrink their hoods and slink back to their holes.

The rump of the Rakshasa army now reformed itself and advanced with terrific war-shouts. Indrajit rained arrows in showers, and Lakshmana advanced to face him, deafening the world with the twanging of his bow. The Rakshasas and the Vanaras fled on either side unable to bear the iron-rain rained on them by the two matchless heroes even like clouds. Hanuman's whole body was pierced by the Rakshasa's darts which entered it like cobras entering their holes, and he minded them not and fought on. Lakshmana tore off with a single powerful dart the armour of the Rakshasa. But, in spite of it Indrajit did not stop his shooting, but rained his darts fiercely on his foe. All his arrows, however, were parried by the superior craft of Lakshmana. So he took a lance, the gift of Shiva, and launched it right against

1 VI xxvii 16.

the neck of his enemy. But Lakshmana sent an arrow which went with the force of curses of the great Rishis, and cut the lance in two in mid-air. Again the Rakshasa tried his deadly arrows. But Lakshmana aimed at his quivers and destroyed his whole store of arrows, and with another skilfully aimed dart felled his charioteer's hill-huge head to the ground.

But Indrajit flinched not. He took the reins himself. He directed his horses with consummate skill with his left hand, and holding his bow in the same hand, he plucked the arrows stuck in his own mighty body—for his quivers were gone—and speeding them back against his foe sent a shudder through the limbs of all beholders with his war-cries. Even the gods, his enemies, admired his skill and resource, and rained on him the flowers of heaven saying,

> 'Verily this Indrajit is the first among the heroes who deserve to be called the bravest of the brave. True valour flinches not even at the point of death!'[1]

Even Lakshmana exclaimed,

> 'He flinches not : his hand is firm ; he plucks
> The arrows I have buried in his chest
> And aims them back at me, and lo, they come
> Innumerable! Methinks pure Valour ends
> With him and Ram!'[2]

Now Vibhishana said to Lakshmana that Indrajit might possibly rise with his car into the sky, or, giving up normal fight, try his magic illusions ; and suggested that, as the Rakshasa arm is more powerful in the night than during the day, he should try to prolong the fight without giving him a moment's respite till daybreak. But Lakshmana proudly replied,

> 'Would not his car career in the sky
> When I my shattering arrows fling and tear
> Its wheels? To-day, be sure, there's only one
> Issue to the fight : this day he meets his doom!'[3]

After some more fierce fighting Lakshmana was able to shatter the chariot of the enemy. But Indrajit stood on the centre-plate of the car and showered his arrows upon Lakshmana, and then

[1] VI xxvii 30. [2] VI xxvii 31. [3] VI xxvii 33.

rose into the sky. Lakshmana only heard his thundering war-cries —he saw not his form. By the force of the *tapas* that he had done in former days, Indrajit unfastened the flood-gates of heaven and rained hail-stones upon his foes. The Vanaras fell by the thousand, but none could locate him in the sky. So, Lakshmana sowed the sky with his fiery arrows and forced him to discover himself. As soon as he saw him, Lakshmana used all his might and sent a powerful arrow against him that clove his left arm clean. It fell like a cloud bearing the many coloured rain-bow in its bosom, and in its crash-down it shattered rocks and trees and killed innumerable Vanaras also. The gods wondered and said,

> 'We'd thought the moon would fall or Meru hill
> Would crumble and roll upon the ground, ere arm
> Of Indrajit could broken be. If this
> Could from its mighty trunk be torn, then life
> Is but a machine toy : where is the use
> In clinging fast to it ?'[1]

But even then Indrajit was not daunted. He took a lance which Indra long ago had obtained by doing great austerities and at his defeat had surrendered to him, and hurled it with a mighty force against Lakshmana. It came like a whirlwind mad, like the 'male' thunderbolt, like fire, like Death when on the Day of Destruction he consumes all. But the end of the Rakshasa was come. It flashed in the mind of Lakshmana just at that moment that without the greatest *tapas*, a foe who could send such a lance with such force even when his left arm was clean cut off could never be killed. And what *tapas* could be greater than taking the name of Rama with an act of stupendous faith ? So he turned aside to avoid the lance, placed an arrow in the rest saying,

> 'If Ram is none but He incarnate, whom
> The Vedas sing and Brahmans worship low,
> Then speed, my faithful dart, and hale the head
> Of yonder Indrajit !'[2]

pulled the string with all his might and let it go.

It clove the air, shaming the *Chakra* of Vishnu, the thunderbolt of Indra, and the deadly trident of the Fire-eyed God,[3] and

[1] VI xxvii 46. [2] VI xxvii 51. [3] Shiva.

breathing out flames all over, it struck Indrajit in the neck and clean carried off his head!

> When Indrajit fell dead, the first of those
> That wield the mighty bow, the gods felt sure
> That Ravan's cruel rule could last no more,
> And danced with joy all o'er the fields of heaven,
> Unknowing e'en their clothes had fallen off
> Their forms: so look th' images of the saints
> Which Jainas worship in their fanes.

The gods now made themselves manifest on earth, and their presence resuscitated the Vanaras who had fallen on the field. For had they not fought on the side of Virtue?

So fell the mighty Indrajit. Lakshmana, like Achilles, lacks the supreme grandeur of soul that refuses even to appear to take revenge on the dead which characterises Shri Rama Chandra. For, he has the head of the fallen Indrajit carried as a trophy to his camp and displayed before his brother.

But the valour of Indrajit is not lessened by any indignities shown to his dead body. As the poet makes Lakshmana himself say, he is the very personification of valour equal to Rama himself in that grand male virtue. It is true that he was bad, cruel, wily. But his valour and the heroism that he displays till the very moment of his fall make us forget his evil qualities and remember him only as the proud defender of his father's glories. And the last scene between him and his father, the tears that he sheds for him, the appeals that his loyal Rakshasa knights make to him to be permitted to die by his side, and his request to them to stand by his father rather than follow him, all these add to the tragic pathos of the circumstances that make this once proud hero enter upon his last conflict with the consciousness that, however bravely he might fight, he could not escape his doom.

CHAPTER IX

VIBHISHANA AND KUMBHAKARNA

We have seen in Indrajit the warrior whose heart is whole, that is, is not torn by a conflict of duties. He finds that his father has provoked a war : he does not care to inquire whether he is right or wrong, but straightway resolves to fight his battles for him, and relying on his valour proudly enters the field with the confidence of victory. In this chapter we propose to study the characters of the brothers of Ravana who felt that Ravana is heading towards ruin in retaining Sita in Lanka, but who acted each in a different way in pursuance of his own idea of what duty requires of him.

Vibhishana is the youngest of the three Rakshasa brothers. While Ravana and Kumbhakarna, (the latter in the intervals of his deep sleep of months at a time) were conquering and oppressing the worlds, Vibhishana was doing acts of righteousness and mercy in Lanka. The reader will remember Indrajit's taunts that he had no part or lot in the conquests made by his father.

The first time that we meet him in the epic is when he interposes in favour of Hanuman when Ravana orders that he should be put to death. He says that the envoy always acts for another, and that, therefore, he should never be put to the sword.

> 'We have heard of kings putting even women to death,' he said, 'but never yet have we heard of princes killing ambassadors. Even the gods will mock at us if we stoop to this sacrilege. . . . Did not even the Men desist from killing our sister ? They sent her away alive after only maiming her . . . . And, if this envoy is killed, how will the enemies know and fear our power and strength ?'[1]

Here we see Vibhishana using only those arguments that would find favour with his brother. And Ravana also listened to his advice without questioning any further. But, when after Hanuman had burned down Lanka and it had been rebuilt, the war-council met, he stoutly opposed the war and recommended that Sita should be sent back to her husband.

Indrajit had scarcely ended his fighting speech[2] when Vibhishana intervened in the debate and began by reprimanding his nephew, saying,

1 V xiii 113, 116.

2 See page 102 et seq.

'Thou art still too young, my boy, to join in this debate. Thy mind sees not whole; thou dost not realise the critical nature of the times we now live in, nor the consequences of the advice that thou givest. Thou art like a blind man who would foolishly attempt to touch up a picture that is being painted by artists. . . .

'Even those who had in former times conquered the gods in their might and ruled them in their pride with an iron rod, have only fallen ignominiously in the end. For who are the evil ones that ever permanently ruled the Devas? A truce, therefore, to thy childish, foolish talk!'[1]

After silencing Indrajit, he began to address Ravana in these words:

. . . . . . 'If thou wilt not my words
Despise, my liege, I'll tell thee what I judge
Will save our state from overwhelming ruin.
Thou'rt father, mother, brother to me, and lord,
To whom I worship owe. I'm pained to see
Thee threatened with the loss of sovereign power
More glorious far than Indra's heavenly rule.
And that is why I dare to stand 'fore thee
And war oppose. I boast not learning great,
Or subtle mind that probes all things to their root,
Or gift of tongue that audience compels.
Yet hear me to the end, and then alone
Condemn. . . Our Lanka fair and all thy wealth
Therein is burned: but are they wise who say
It is a monkey caused this ruin dire?
No, 'tis the fire of Sita's chastity
That has, believe me, our glorious town consumed.
That may'st recall to mind the oracle old
That said that through a damsel fair
Will wane the mighty Rakshas power. Has it,
My brother, now lost its force?'[2]

Then, after saying that Ravana, in the days when he obtained blessings and boons from the gods for his austerities, had neglected to obtain invincibility at the hands of men and Vanaras, and after reminding him that he had been overmatched in strength by Kartavirya Arjuna, the man, and Vali, the Vanara, he assured

[1] VI ii 66, 67, 70. [2] VI ii 72-75, 77.

him that Sita was none else but the incarnation of the woman who had fallen into the fire swearing to destroy him in her next birth as a revenge for his attempting to violate her, and that Rama and Lakshmana were none but the Supreme God incarnated in two bodies for the salvation of the world. He said also that he had heard that the great Vishvamitra had been their preceptor in archery and military science, that Rama had broken the bow of Shiva, and that Agastya had armed him with the bow with which Vishnu had destroyed the *Asuras,* and the darts and *astras* with which Shiva had consumed the three flying cities. He then continued :

'The mighty frame of Vali fell transfixed
By Rama's deadly dart ; the seven trees
That covered the earth and sky uprooted were
By that same force ; and the rock-like heads of Khar,
Viradh and all were rolled upon the ground—
And who but Ram that did this feat achieve ?
Then who could face this Man upon the field ?
And saints and sages do believe that he
Will end our race, and walk erect. And gods
Who lived but in thy smiles, have fearless grown,
And say that Janaki's the deadly poison
That is to kill the Rakshasas. . . . . .
Dark are the omens that we see about :
Our horses and our elephants—trophies won
From Devas in our fights of yore—now enter
Their stalls with right legs to the fore : and hair
Of many a Rakshas youth and many a maid young
Catch fire without a cause ; and jackals huge
Do promenade our streets in search of prey. . . . .
So let us not the glory of our race
Distain with shame, but send away the fair
Sita, e'er fixed in her chastity.
No higher victory can bless our arms
Than this surrender willing !'[1]

Vibhishana ended. But Ravana merely mocked at him laughing. He said,

'Thou spok'st of judgement and of wisdom, brother :
But what has come o'er thee ? The puny race

[1] VI ii 90-92, 95, 96, 99.

Of men, thou say'st, will conquer Rakshas might :
'Sit fear or love of them, I crave to know,
That does possess thy mind ? I am not armed
With blessings of the gods, forsooth, to fight
With men. But did the gods give me the power
Express to break the might of the Mammoths huge
That bear the earth aloft, or lift the mount,
The throne of Shiv ? Thou spokest of curses breathed
'Gainst me by Nandidev : But am I not
The targe of endless curses which the weak
Have flung at me ? And of the Devas, Saints,
And Sages, who are there that curse me not ?
And yet I rule the heavens and the earth without
A peer ! Where then are gone their curses ? I know
Thy Ram killed Vali great who conquered me.
But who could face the mighty ape and win ?
And Rama ambushed him and aimed his dart !
Now who but thee can sing the power of him
Who broke the crumbled bow of Shiv, and lost
His throne by woman's guile, and lost his home
By Ravan's sport ? '[1]

But Vibhishana again pressed his point that Rama was the Supreme God, incarnated as man expressly to destroy the Rakshasas who were oppressing the worlds, and that, therefore, he should not provoke him, but return his spouse to him and live with him at peace. But Ravana again spoke of his own might and past achievements, and asked,

'When I, the king of heaven brought in chains,
Or broke the tusks of th' Elephants divine,
Or won in every war the rebel gods
Provoked, where was the God Supreme then hid ?
Lacked he his might those days ? . . . . .
Seated upon their Eagle and their Bull
Vishnu and Shiv have fled before my darts
That broke their backs e'en as lightning breaks the rocks.'
He ceased : and winking to his wicked peers,
He taunted thus his brother : 'Fear not I'll call
Thee to the field : rest thou at home secure ! '[2]

[1] VI ii 101, 102, 106, 108, 109. [2] VI ii 113, 116, 117.

Even now Vibhishana did not give up his attempt to cure his brother of his pride and lust. He prayed to him to listen to the story of Hiranyakashipu who was far more powerful and stronger than him, and who ruled over even other universes than this, and yet who was torn to pieces by the claws of Vishnu incarnated as Man-Lion.[1]

Though hardened in his heart against the sending away of Sita, Ravana yet listened to the story. It did not, however, make any impression on him and when Vibhishana had finished, he only taunted him more cruelly and frowned at him. He said,

'Thou praisedest him who was rejoiced to see
His father clawed to death. And where shall we
In all the world his like behold, except
In thee who tak'st the side of thy brother's foes?
And like him dost thou thirst to rule this land
When I have fallen upon the field? Think'st thou
That Fate will grant thy wish? . . . .
Thou bearest love to men who're now become
My foes: Thou dost conspire my fall: thy heart
Is set upon the Rakshas crown. What can
My real enemies more? The day when I
Commanded that the Vanar should be killed
Thou saved'st him from my wrath. I knew not then,
But now I see, the reason why. Thine eyes
Saw far, and even then thou didst decide
To join him. A coward thou, unfit
For martial deeds! Thy heart is full of dark
Designs, and thou dost love my hated foes,
Belying thy race: methinks the cobra is
Less deadly than thee. Yet I kill thee not
Fearing reproach. But open not thy lips
Again, and leave me straight! If thou dost show
Thy face in these my realms, thou die'st at once!'[2]

Vibhishana at once rose up by his Rakshas power into the sky, but even yet his heart yearned for his brother. He again spoke to him of righteousness, but Ravana would not listen to him. And so, saying, 'I intended nothing but thy good, but thou will not listen: forgive my boldness, I go,' he flew with four

[1] This episode is one of the most interesting in the whole *Ramayana*, and we shall devote a separate chapter to it.

[2] VI iv 4, 6, 7-9.

of his councillors towards where Rama was encamped on the mainland with his Vanara army.

He saw the army and asked his councillors what they should do. They said that they must see the Holy One, and he accepted their opinion saying,

> 'Let us take refuge in Rama's feet and then we shall be freed from the cycle of birth and death.'[1]

He waited till the day dawned, approached the camp, and standing in front of it cried aloud, 'O Raghava, I take refuge in thee!' But the Vanara guards mistook him and his companions for enemies and wanted to fight them. The cry, however, had fallen on the ears of Rama and he immediately sent a messenger to ascertain who was in distress. The messenger ordered the guards to desist from molesting the Rakshasas and after ascertaining from Vibhishana all that was necessary to know, returned and told Rama all that he had gathered. Rama now called a war-council and asked each of his friends to give his opinion as to whether Vibhishana should be admitted to their camp or no. After much discussion, Rama, as the reader will remember,[2] accepted Hanuman's opinion and desired Vibhishana to be brought in. When Sugriva came and told Vibhishana that Rama had given him refuge and invited him to his presence,

> Tears fell down Vibhishan's sable cheeks,
> Joy filled his anxious heart, and his hair stood
> On end; and thus unburdened he his mind:
> 'Did He accept my homage, even mine,
> Who am the brother of him who parted Sita
> From Him? Or did He pity feel, because
> I come a refugee from Ravan's wrath?
> Unworthy though I be, O sir, I am
> By Rama's ruth exalted high e'en as
> The poison was when it was drunk by Shiv.
> If this should be His mercy's way, and this
> The counsel of His noble heart, then doomed,
> Alas, is all our Rakshas race! . . . .
> The blessed Hero, Saviour of the men
> Of holy life, has pledged His word august
> And has accepted me His devotee!
> Great is my blessing, for I'm saved from cycle
> Of birth and death and aye from the burning pit!'[3]

[1] VI iv 20. [2] *See* page 67. [3] VI iv 125-127, 129.

Vibhishana was in due course ushered into Rama's presence and acepted by him as a brother.[1]

Rama then solemnly crowned him as King of Lanka, declaring that the sovereignty of Lanka would rest in him so long as his own name would last on earth. And all the worlds shouted for joy.

Valmiki motives Rama's acceptance of the Rakshasa to a large extent on the *tantra* of *Bheda*—*i.e.* the policy of taking over to his side the person who has become the enemy of one's enemy. For although—as Valmiki tells the story—Rama tells the war-council that he will never turn out any person who comes to him as a friend even though he may have many faults, yet when Sugriva objects to him as a traitor to his brother, and therefore unworthy of faith, he says,

> '*The Rakshasa desires sovereignty ; and people of this stamp are usually very clever. . . . He fears for his fate in his native country and that is why he takes refuge with me, giving up his brother.*'

After Sugriva has again reiterated his original objections—which appear to be, from the standpoint of dramatic construction, entirely superfluous and untimely because Rama's decision has been already very clearly expressed and Sugriva brings forward no new arguments—Rama gives utterance to those grand words which are so highly prized by all Vaishnavas, among which occurs the sentence,

> '*When a man filled with fear*
> *Seeks refuge at my hands, I never say nay,*
> *I give him protection—that is my vow—so*
> *Bring him in whether it be Vibhishana or even*
> *Ravana himself.*'[2]

The effect of this noble *abhayapradana*,[3] however, is almost utterly spoiled when Valmiki makes Rama ask Vibhishana, at

1 *See* page 52.
2 Griffith translates thus:

> "*Bound by a solemn vow I swear*
> *That all my saving help should share*
> *Who sought me in distress and cried,*
> *'Thou art my hope, and none beside.'*
> *Then go, I pray thee, Vanar King,*
> *Vibishan to my presence bring.*
> *Yea, were he Ravan's self, my vow*
> *Forbids me to reject him now.*"

3 Offering protection from fear and danger.

the very moment that he falls at his feet, to tell him all about the defences of Lanka and the army of the Rakshasas.

That Valmiki depicts Vibhishana as partly at least attracted to the side of Rama by his desire to usurp his brother's throne would appear from the words that he puts into his mouth when he sees Rama and Lakshmana fallen on the battle-field wounded by the arrows of Indrajit. Among other things Vibhishana, in Valmiki, says,

> '*Those two warriors on whose valour I counted*
> *So much for the sake of my advancement*
> *Are now fallen on the field and are dead.*
> *Today I live a ruined man, with all*
> *My dreams of sovereignty gone for ever.*'[1]

These words, taken along with Rama's quoted before, make of Vibhishana little more than a common traitor who has had the good fortune of having foreseen in time the sure ultimate victory of Rama. And this should explain the bad odour that surrounds the name of Vibhishana among modern critics of the *Ramayana* in Bengal. But in the south, where the cult of Rama as the *avatar* of Vishnu, if it did not actually take its origin, at least found its greatest devotees of genius in the early centuries of the *Salivahana* era,[2] the character of Vibhishana was seen from a standpoint widely different from what would be justified by the delineation of Valmiki. He began to be looked upon as the great *Bhakta* of Rama, instead of as a selfish adventurer. And it is as a *Bhakta* that Kamban delineates him. That is why he takes care that he does not anywhere put into his mouth such selfish sentiments as Valmiki does not hesitate to put. That is why he elaborates his remonstrations with Ravana to such an extent. And that is why, again, he does not allow his Rama to speak of Vibhishana as coveting his brother's throne, or to begin to discuss with him the defences of Lanka at the very moment of his giving his *abhaya*.

1 Griffith translates as follows:

> '*I on their might for aid relied,*
> *And in my cause they fought and died.*
> *Lost is the hope that soothed each pain:*
> *I live, but live no more to reign,*
> *While Lanka's lord, untouched by ill,*
> *Exults in safe defiance still.*'

2 beginning from 78 A.D.

Kamban, of course, makes Rama obtain from Vibhishana every information concerning Ravana and Lanka. But Rama, in Kamban, does not attempt to obtain such information at once or of his own initiative. After Vibhishana had been admitted into Rama's friendship, Kamban describes Rama as lamenting once again over the separation of Sita. As Rama is thus lamenting, Sugriva comes to Rama and lightly reprimands him saying,

> 'How is it that thou art thus indulging in vain laments when thou ought to be up and doing after learning all that we can from him who has lately joined us as an ally?'[1]

It is only after this that Rama invites Vibhishana to tell him all about Lanka.

By all these devices the sentiments of the critical reader are bespoke in favour of Vibhishana and Vibhishana's character is saved from the charge of treachery that the circumstances of his position inevitably bring against it.

It is not that Kamban does not realise that Vibhishana can be delineated as, at least in part, a self-centred adventurer. He has studied his Valmiki, too closely for that. He does realise the possibility of such a delineation and it is this realisation that makes him consciously and deliberately remove the possibility of such an impression being created by some of Vibhishana's actions. So, when Lakshmana falls on the field bound by the cobra-noose, Kamban puts this lament in the mouth of Vibhishana:

> 'By side of Lakshman are fallen all
> Upon the field, and I alone remain
> Untouched: Oh, what will people say of me?
> The world will surely think I stood by him
> Alone to have him killed by Indrajit,
> Myself a false-faced spy betraying all
> To my brother's son. Me miserable! With mace
> I did not rush upon the foe and bring
> Him to the ground, and prove my native valour.
> Nor quitted I this cursed life when I
> Beheld my Lakshman fall: and still I weep
> As if my heart is full of love! If I
> Had joined in the fight, I could have shattered
> The Rakshas force, and proved my loyal heart
> To Ram. Now neither am I loyal and true
> To the land that gave me birth, nor to the Men

[1] VI v 12.

With whom I refuge took. I am become
A faggot that doth burn at both its ends!'[1]

Owing to the delicacy of his position, Vibhishana does not take part in the actual fighting in any of the battles. It is only after Indrajit aims at him his lance in his third battle that he forgets himself and strikes his chariot and horses down with his mace. But it is he, as the reader will remember, that advises Lakshmana at every critical moment as to what weapon to use and generally what to do. That is why Rama exclaims to Lakshmana when Indrajit's head is brought before him after the last battle:

''Tis not thy arms, O lion 'mong men, that brought
The foe of Indra down; nor owe we this
Triumph to blessing of a god, or might
Of Hanuman though great as Shesh himself:
It is Vibhishan with his counsel sage
That's guided us to victory!'[2]

In order to increase the interest of the reader in Vibhishana, Kamban adds some able touches to a scene suggested by Valmiki[3] in the crude, and at a single stroke raises heaven-high the characters of Vibhishana, Angada, Hanuman, Sugriva, and especially of Lakshmana, and gives them the stamp supreme of Indian heroism. While in one part of the field Rama was fighting single-handed the whole reserve force of Ravana, Ravana marched with a big army against the Vanaras led by Lakshmana. When every other weapon had failed against Lakshmana, Ravana took the *Mohana-astra*, the unfailing missile created by Brahma with which even Shiva was conquered by Manmatha, and sent it against Lakshmana. It would have ended him then and there had he not, at the suggestion of Vibhishana, parried it with the only weapon that had power over it, namely, the *Narayana-astra*. Seeing his brother, whom he regarded as the blackest traitor imaginable, ruin his only chance of victory at the time when it was so near, Ravana burned with anger and hurled against him the deadly lance called *Shakti* which could not be parried by any missile in the three worlds. The lance came cleaving the air with a mighty force, and Vibhishana who knew its secret told

[1] VI xviii 209-212. [2] VI xxvii 71.
[3] Book VI, Canto 101, Southern Recension.

Lakshmana that nothing could withstand it and that therefore his end was come.

> ' But ', Lakshman said, ' Thou know'st my skill, fear not,
> Be sure I'll break its force,' and aimed his darts
> Against the rushing lance. But impotent
> They fell, as sinners' curses 'gainst the man
> Of life austere. Great Lakshman saw, and quick
> As thought, he stepped before Vibhishana
> To shield him from the deadly arm. For death
> Was nought to him : but could he bear the thought
> Of seeing him destroyed before his eyes
> Who fearing the vengeance of a brother had ta'en
> Refuge with Ram ? And what is fleeting life,
> Thought he, when weighed 'gainst lasting glory earned
> By sacrifice of self ? But could the good
> Consent to save themselves at other's cost ?
> Vibhishan rushed before : but Angada
> Outstripped them both, while Han'man and the king
> Of Vanaras sprang in front to face the lance.
> But Lakshman would not change his first resolve
> And rushing past them all received its point
> Upon his mighty chest. It pierced him through
> From front to back and felled him down.[1]

Vibhishana was touched to see Lakshmana fall while saving his own life, and mace in hand he dashed against Ravana and struck down his horses and charioteer. But Ravana rose into the sky, and seeing Lakshmana fallen a prey to his lance, a better result than what he had intended to achieve, he did not care to aim at Vibhishana whom he despised as a coward ; and proud of his victory he flew over to his palace inside the walls of the city.

To resuscitate Lakshmana, Kamban, like Valmiki, sends Hanuman again to the Sanjivi hills to bring the healing drugs. But while Valmiki redescribes the flight of Hanuman in the same detailed fashion as he had done the previous one, and makes him look for the hill—he having lost his bearings—, Kamban with great tact relieves the reader, who is fearing a repetition of past descriptions, by describing the flight and return in half a stanza.

When Rama heard what had happened, his heart leaped with joy. He embraced his brother and said,

1 VI xxxi 28-32.

'By fearless sacrifice, without a thought
Of self, of thy precious life for him who has
his safety sought with us, thou hast, my brother,
Proved thyself worthy child of Raghu's race:
Who can thy greatness measure? We can but try
To follow thee. Thou hast in ruth surpassed
Ev'n him our great ancestor who the dove
Redeemed with his own bleeding flesh. What more?
Thou hast the saying proved, my child, that men
With ruth-filled heart would rush through fire to save
Their own from grief, ev'n as the cow would face
The tiger and the lion to save its calf.'[1]

The love of Lakshmana and Rama has cast a halo round the name of Vibhishana and the whole of Vaishnava India has included him in its catalogue of saints and *Bhaktas*. But the loyalty of Kumbhakarna to his nation and to his king makes him the more interesting and the more lovable of the two brothers of Ravana. For, though he upbraids Ravana for his crime in carrying off Sita and retaining her in Lanka, he would not leave his side and betray his secrets to his enemy though he comes to know that enemy to be God himself in human form.

At the war-council, in Valmiki, Kumbhakarna's speech is not properly worked up. There he charges Ravana with having provoked the war without having consulted his ministers. He does not at all touch upon the moral aspect of the affair in his speech which does not fit in either with what goes before or what comes after. After saying that, although his brother had got into a scrape, he would yet destroy his enemies, Kumbhakarna prophesies[2] that by a second arrow Raghava would kill him, that is Kumbhakarna.[3] But in the very next sentence he continues,

[1] VI xxxi 48, 49.

[2] This must be due to some interpolation in the text. It is unfortunate that the editors of the Valmiki *Ramayana* have not given the same attention to the text in this passage as they have given generally to the whole poem.

[3] Griffith, however, renders differently:

"*No second dart shall Rama cast:*
The first he aims shall be his last:
He falls, and these dry lips shall drain
The blood of him my hand has slain;
And Sita, when her champion dies,
Shall be thy undisputed prize." (P)

'Then I shall drink his blood. . . I shall kill
Rama and Lakshmana and eat up the Vanara chiefs.
Therefore enjoy all luxuries, drink wine, and attend
To thy royal duties without any further anxiety.
When I send Rama to his doom, Sita will become
Thine for ever.'

Ravana, however, fights his first battle without Kumbhakarna who had gone in the meanwhile into his deep sleep of months. When he is defeated, he wakes Kumbhakarna from his sleep and prays to him in abject tones to take the field against Rama and Lakshmana. But now Kumbhakarna speaks in quite a different tone altogether. He speaks now of Dharma and Adharma and says that Ravana would go to hell for his unrighteousness and then makes a long-winded speech about the necessity of consulting one's ministers and advisers before entering upon a big undertaking. He winds up, by asking Ravana to follow the advice that Vibhishana had given in the beginning. When he ends, Ravana frowns upon him, talks some commonplace and then begs him to 'repair my errors with thy valour.' When he hears these words, Kumbhakarna without any more ado asks him to give up his fears, for he will fight and kill Rama and Lakshmana and drive the Vanaras out of Lanka. 'Fear thou Rama no more,' he says with a patronising air, 'I shall finish Rama, Lakshmana, Sugriva, Hanuman,' etc. [1]

But Kamban has given quite a different character to Kumbhakarna. At the war-council Kamban's Kumbhakarna condemns the unrighteousness of keeping Sita in Lanka, but, as the enemy had been provoked and war had become inevitable, he proposes that although it was impossible to conquer him who had killed Khara, they should cross the sea and attack Rama in force on the mainland itself. His Rakshasic pride makes him say,

> 'Thou hast left the path of the righteous and thou hast made us hang down our heads: but if at this stage we send away the fair Sita we shall be merely called cowards. It does not matter if we die, for, then our fame at least would remain unsullied.' [2]

[1] To add to the anarchy of the situation, Valmiki makes Mahodara, one of the councillors of Ravana, reprimand Kumbhakarna for opposing Ravana like a child, and Mahodara does this after Kumbhakarna had changed his mind and agreed to start for the field!

[2] VI ii 53.

But, in Kamban also as in Valmiki,[1] he does not go to the field on the first day of the war as another spell of his long sleep had come over him, and Ravana believed that he could win the war without him. When, however, Ravana finds his enemy's strength by bitter experience, he has Kumbhakarna awakened from his sleep, and after feeding him with cart-loads of meat and casksful of wines asks him to march against the Vanara army. The words of Vibhishana which he had heard at the time of the war-council must be supposed to have impressed themselves upon Kumbhakarna's mind and entered deeply into his soul during his hibernation, for, he addresses Ravana now in quite a different strain altogether. He speaks in this wise :

> 'Is war begun, and grief of Sita, chaste
> Beyond compare, is it unended yet ?
> Is our good name that filled the earth and heaven
> Become a story of the past ? And day
> Of our final doom foretold, has it begun
> To dawn ? . . . . . .
> Thy sin has Heaven's king restored to his throne
> And brought the Rakshas race to ruin's edge.
> And Devas thou hast freed from Rakshas yoke !
> Destruction hangs o'er thee and all thy house,
> Inevitable. The Dharma that did build
> Thy power has fled 'fore thine eyes : now what
> Can prop thy tottering throne ? Thy foes are full
> Of ruth ; their every act is based on Dharm ;
> And courtesy is in their speech. Can we
> Who know but guile, untruth and sin, hope e'er
> To last ? And can they e'er be overwhelmed ?
> The ape who storm-like could the ocean leap
> Is yet alive ; Rama's quiver holdeth yet
> The dart that tore great Vali's chest. What more
> Want we for our success ?
> One final word
> I'll say to thee. If thou would hear, 't 'll do
> Thee good. If thou would not, I fear thy fate
> Is doomed. So send this damsel to her spouse
> And falling at his feet, conciliate

[1] But Valmiki makes Indrajit's triumphs with his cobra-noose and other weapons precede the fight with Kumbhakarna. In fact there is much that is anticlimactic in Valmiki's description of the war.

Thy brother and live in peace. If this thou hatest
To do, and dost decide to fight to th' end,
Battle at least with all thy forces joined,
And try to overwhelm the foe.' [1]

But all this advice is only gall and wormwood to the proud Ravana.

''Tis not to consult thee,' said he, 'that I
Did call thee here'. I bid thee go and fight
The men : Art thou a councillor sage, that thou
Presum'st to give advice? A craven thou,
Afraid to face the foe in battle! I've filled
Thy gluttonous maw with flesh and flowing wine :
Now close complete thy drowsy, falling lids
And go to sleep! Vibhishan's gone before :
Follow thou him and fall at the feet of men
And hunch-backed monkeys all. Such glory well
Becomes Vibhishana thy brother and thee!'
He said, and turning to the waiting heralds
Burst forth, 'Bring now my chariot, and send
This challenge out by beat of drum : let earth
And heaven combine in aid of Ram ; I am
Prepared to meet them on the gory field!' [2]

So saying, Ravana stood up and made ready to start for the field, but Kumbhakarna stopped him. And taking his mighty trident in his hand, he fell at his brother's feet and thus spoke to him :

'Forgive me, my brother, I go : but I hope not
For victory against the Men. 'Tis fate
That drives me on. This day will be my last
Upon the earth. But brother, at least when I'm
No more, release the human damsel fair.
I see no other way.'[3]

As he is thus speaking, a prophetic vision comes on him and he continues,

[1] VI xv 79, 83-89. [2] VI xv 90-93. [3] VI xv 94.

'Our Indrajit, I see, will fall by dart
Of Lakshman, brother of Ram. And all that him
Survive, behold they're scattered like the dust
Against the angry storm. If me they beat,
My brother, 'tis certain they will vanquish thee.
'Tis only fools repent when all is lost:
Be wise in time and send her back to Ram.
And Dharma also points that way.
If from
Our childhood up to now, my king, I have
Ever offended thee, I pray to thee
With folded hands, forgive thy erring brother!
My heart doth tell me, brother, this meeting is
Our last. These eyes, alas, will look no more
Upon thy dear face! I take thy leave.'[1]

He left the presence followed by the tear-filled eyes of Ravana and those about him. He then ascended his car and marched at the head of a vast army. Rama saw his colossal form from far away, and, amazed, asked Vibhishana who and what he was. After saying that he was his own elder brother and that he was the terror of the gods, Vibhishana added that he had like himself advised Ravana to send back Sita, but that, though Ravana had refused to listen to his advice, he had decided to fight and perish on the field. Sugriva, who was by, suggested now that they should try to separate him from Ravana and win him over to their side. Rama agreed, and as they were thinking as to who was the fit person to approach him, Vibhishana offered to go himself.

The whole of this scene between Kumbhakarna and Vibhishana is Kamban's own invention, and he has worked it up grandly. He brings out beautifully the contrast between loyalty to a losing cause and loyalty to Dharma but which is coupled with disloyalty to one's king and brother.

Vibhishana passed the pickets of the Rakshasa army and sent word to his brother that he was come to see him. Kumbhakarna, while he was sorry, unknowing his purpose, that Vibhishana had left Rama's camp, was yet delighted to have the opportunity of casting a last look upon his brother, and ordered him to be brought before him. Vibhishana came in and saluted his brother by falling at his feet.

[1] VI xv 96-98.

He lifted up the brother that clasped his feet,
And folding him unto his breast, he thus
Addressed him : 'I was glad to learn, my brother,
That thou hadst left our doomed camp and ta'en
Refuge with Ram. Why leav'st thou now his side,
Thou innocent, and come to us that rush
Headlong into the jaws of death ? Wilt thou
Exchange thy nectar for our poison black ?
Although our glory's sun is set for ever,
I thought Pulastya's[1] race would be redeemed
By thee, and I was glad. But thou hast dried
My lips and broke my heart by thy return.
Thou hast thrown thyself at their feet who are
The props of Dharm, and they will never give
Thee up, e'en when it means their death. Thou'rt freed
From curse of death so long as men praise Ram,
And thou hast 'scaped the curse of Rakshas birth :
What further craving then does bring thee here ?
By serving th' One Supreme with all thy soul
Thou hast the blessing gained of holy life
And pure : wilt thou yet look on us as kin
Who hanker after others' wives ? Great Brahm
Has blessed thee with a righteous heart, my child,
And wisdom unsurpassed ; while Rama's word
Has given e'erlasting life. And still thou'rt here :
I fear they have not cured the cravings low
Of thy Rakshas birth ! . . . . . .
If thou do spurn the shelter he has given
And cast thy lot with us, pray tell me, brother,
When all the Rakshas race is swept from off
The face of th' earth by Rama's furious darts,
Who will be there to offer sacrifice
To our Manes ? Go back, therefore, to Raghava
And enter Lanka after it is purged
Of all this sinful crew ; and, crowned by Ram
Enjoy a reign of glory unsurpassed.'[2]

Vibhishana heard to the end and told his brother the purpose of his visit in these words :

'The grand-souled hero who his mercy sweet.

1 One of the mind-born sons of Brahma, and the first ancestor of Ravana and his brothers.
2 VI xv 130-135, 137, 138.

Has showered on me unworthy, will accept
Thy homage too, if thou wilt come to him,
And save thee from the cycle of birth and death.
The crown that he has offered me, I'll place
At thy feet, and serve thee as my king and lord,
For thou art elder born. Thou wilt not hear:
But death is certain if thou stand against
Rama. When he his flaming shafts does send,
Canst thou escape? And whither canst thou fly?
Throw not, therefore, thy life away, my brother,
But base thy ways upon the eternal Ved.

The righteous care not whe'r 'tis father, mother,
Or child, but cut themselves away, if these
Persist in mortal sin. . . . .

For crime of one, shall we that know no guilt
Ruin ourselves by fighting on his side?
And holy Parashuram, did he not kill
His very mother for her sin? Ev'n Shiv
Cut off great Brahma's head when he from right
Did swerve: thou'rt wise, learn thou upon them. Shall we
Support a heinous crime and choose the way
That leads to hell? The flesh diseased that grows
Upon our body we cut off and burn
If we would keep the body whole: do ever
The wise mix paste of sandalwood to change
The stench of ocean stream? . . . .

Thou can'st not hope to save thy brother now.
And ev'n if fight'st with all thy former strength
What would it all avail? Thou mayest throw
Thy life away: thou mayest matter give
For vassal gods to mock: but in the end
Will aught but Hell receive thy parted soul?

Though great thy valour, thou hast not tasted joys
Of sovereign power, but wasted all thy youth
And manhood in unbecoming sleep. And now
Desirest thou to fight for sin, and waste
Thy life itself? O brother, follow me:
The time itself is ripe; and blessed by Ram
Conquer thy sleep and gain eternal life
And sovereignty which is thy right.

Perhaps,
Thou thinkest it disgrace to owe thy crown
To Ram. But know that He is God of gods

Himself, Who's born as man to 'stablish Dharm. . . .
 If thou would come to Rama thou would earn
The friendship of the gods and blessings choice
Of Rishis ; and none would dare to injure thee.
And joy would come to thee that knows no end.
'Tis he that in the fulness of his love
And mercy sent me here. Do e'er the wise
Go gathering flowers when fruits hang ripe upon
The tree ? Abandon thou therefore the camp
Of Sin and follow me.' [1]

So saying, Vibhishana again fell at Kumbhakarna's feet. The great heart of Kumbhakarna was touched, but the resolution of his mind was not shaken. So, taking up his brother and embracing him once again, he thus spoke to him while tears flowed down freely from his sable cheeks:

'Can I refuse to give my life for him
Who all these years has cherished me, and now
Has sent me to the field to fight ? Is life
So dear, that's transient as the wavelets playing
On the flowing stream ? So if thou want'st to heal
My sorrow, brother, tarry not, but do
Return to Ram. By great devotion thou
Has't got from Brahm the blessing of a heart
That's free from thoughts of sin : the crown therefore
Of all the worlds doth well befit thy head.
But I'm a sinner born, and Fate is just
That dooms me to death ;—and it will crown
My head with glory's light, my sole delight.
 When kings do swerve from virtue, 'tis but right
To chide and try to turn their hearts from sin.
But if they would not hear, can those who have
Their bounties tasted see their masters run
To ruin, unmoved ? No, when the enemies press,
They'll gird their swords, and seek their fate upon
The field before he falls foredoomed. When Ram
Does aim his fatal darts, and Ravan falls
Embracing the earth ; surrounded by his kin
And loyal troops, shall he a brother lack
To fall with him,—he who the worlds and gods

1 VI xv 139-142, 144-150, 152, 153.

Without a rival ruled? And when his arms
That lifted sheer the rock of Shiv are tied
With cruel cords by messengers of Death,
Shall he with downcast eyes approach the throne
Of Yam, his vassal e'en today, without
A brother by his side?
And can I brook—
Ev'n I who have defeated the God of Death
Himself—can I consent to pass my days,
Singing with an aching heart the praise of him
Who will have pierced my brother's mighty chest? . .
So tarry not, my child; and if thou have
Regard for me, or love, return to Ram,
Abide with him. Think not I can be turned
From my resolve by further words. Now go:
And when w're dead, (this is my dying prayer)
Do soothe our Manes with Vedic rites, and save
Us from the gates of hell. Weep not, my brother
When time doth smile on us, all things we touch
Are turned to gold: but when the tide has fled
Despite our every care we rush to ruin,
Helpless. What can I tell thee more whose eyes
See straight and clear? So do not pity us
Nor waste thy tears, but go from hence in peace.'[1]

He ended, and embracing Vibhishana once again he said with tears flowing down his cheeks unchecked,

'This day doth break for ev'r the tie that bound
Us from our childhood's days!'[2]

Vibhishana's tongue was parched. Tears filled his eyes and his heart was big with unspeakable grief. But as Kumbhakarna was firm in his resolve, he saw that he could not do anything more to change his mind, and so he fell at his feet once again and without a word turned back his step towards Rama's camp. All the Rakshasa soldiers at every step joined their hands in worship as he passed by.

Kumbhakarna was glad that he went back, but the actual fact of separation broke his heart, and his eyes rained blood, the very fountains of his tears being dried up!

[1] VI xv 155-160, 164. [2] VI xv 167.

But soon he recovers his poise and the fight begins. The fight is described in the best style of Kamban but we shall not describe it elaborately as we have to claim the attention of the reader for many more single combats and battle-pieces yet. Still we do not desire to deprive him of the enjoyment of some of the great challenges of the heroes with which this canto abounds. And so we shall describe this battle as briefly as possible.

After the common Vanaras and Rakshasas had fallen on either side, and Nila the commander-in-chief of the Vanara forces had been knocked down by Kumbhakarna with the left-hand—he did not aim his trident against him because the Vanara was unarmed —Angada, the son of Vali, came to the attack. He took up a mighty rock and hurled it with force against the Rakshasa to the amazement of the gods who cried, 'The end of Ravana's brother is come!' But Kumbhakarna received it on his adamantine shoulders, and the rock broke into a thousand fragments. The Vanaras who saw the strength of the Rakshasa by this proof fled in terror. But Angada stood his ground and caught by the hand the huge mace that his foe threw at him, while the Devas blessed him and admired his strength and skill. With the same mace in his hand he sprang upon the chariot of Kumbhakarna, intending to pound him to death with it. But Kumbhakarna eyed him in wrath, and asked him:

'Art thou the king of Vanaras flocked from far
To leave their bones to whiten on our coast?
Or may'st thou be his son? Or art thou he
Who burned our city fair and triumphed o'er
Our heroes bold? Declare at once.'[1]

Angada replied:

'Know me to be the son of him who caught
Thy brother with his vice-like tail, and flew
Lightly to th' oceans four to worship Shiv,
The while thy brother breathless struggled against
His strangling hold. Behold I'm come to end
Thee here; and what my father to thy brother
Did, I propose to do to thee: for I
Shall lift thy carcass with my coiling tail
And place it reeking at my Rama's feet.'[2]

[1] VI xv 191.

[2] VI xv 192.

And then,

'Thy thought is just,' said laughing Kumbhakarn,
'For verily the world will laugh at thee
If thou fight not for him who from a cover
Concealed did kill thy parent innocent
With a single dart. Now that thou fight'st his wars—
For Thy father's foe—the chivalry of the world
Will sure acclaim thee bravest of the brave!
But I believe thou speakest not the truth:
Thou canst not even dream of touching me.
Much less wouldst hope to fly with me to Ram.
I fancy 'tis thy wish to taste the point
Of my fell trident that has in the past
The front of Devas oft pierced, and fall
Supine, thy hands and feet upthrowing wild
E'en like thy tail!'[1]

Angada did not care to reply, but struck a thundering blow upon the rock-like body of Kumbhakarna with the captured mace. But the mace broke into a hundred fragments, and the Rakshasa stood unmoved as if nothing had happened. Angada now aimed a blow with his fist, but his enemy guarded himself and knocked him down senseless with his own fist. Angada was removed from the field by his friends, but Hanuman appeared on the scene just at that minute. He lifted up a massive rock and aimed it against Kumbhakarna's head. But Kumbhakarna caught it in his hands and sent the same with force against Hanuman. The rock broke into fragments when it struck the chest of Hanuman, giving out sparks like the iron hammered on the blacksmith's anvil. Hanuman now uprooted another and heavier rock and, poising it in his hand, addressed his enemy thus:

'This rock I hurl at thee: if from its shock
Thou canst escape alive, the world will count
Thy might invincible, and I shall deem
Myself defeated at thy hands, and face
Thee not again in battle; and great will be
Thy fame on earth.'[2]

1 VI xv 193, 194. 2 VI xv 200.

Kumbhakarna laughed and thus replied :

> 'What speakest thou of shock and life and death ?
> I tell thee this : I'll let it strike my frame :
> If when it strikes I move from where I stand
> The breadth of a single hair, I shall admit
> Defeat, and own myself, a weaker wight
> Than thee !'[1]

Hanuman now threw his rock, but Kumbhakarna did not move. He received it on his mighty shoulder and, behold, it broke into fragments to the terror of all the worlds. Hanuman kept his word, and went away crestfallen.

The reader will remember that Lakshmana now fought with the Rakshasa and broke his bow and chariot and that the reinforcements sent by Ravana separated them. In the melee, Kumbhakarna found himself opposed by Sugriva, whom he soon overpowered and caught in his arms. He looked upon his capture as very lucky, as the Vanara host would lose heart if he could remove him from the field altogether. So he hurried towards the fort carrying Sugriva, who had already swooned in his hands. Hanuman followed hesitating to fight, as he respected his own word that he would not fight with him again. But Rama had already been apprised of Sugriva's plight, and bow in hand he came to the rescue of his friend and built an impassable wall, solely with his fast-flying arrows, across the path of the Rakshasa. Unable now to move forward, the latter now turned round and seeing Rama challenged him thus :

> 'Think'st thou I am Kavandh, or Vali the ape
> Who lived on flowers, that thou dost dare to cross
> My path and hope to throw me down ? Com'st thou
> To free Sugriv ? I scorn to fight thy brother
> Or Hanuman or Vali's son : for where's
> The glory in defeating them ? I searched
> For thee all o'er the field, but nowhere wert
> Thou found : thy forces fled, thy brother deemed
> It wise to seek some other foes ; while son
> Of Vayu lost his gauge and slunk away.
> Sugriva came my way, and lo, I have

1 VI xv 201.

Him in my arms a prisoner tight. I thank
The luck that brought thee here. I mean to send
Thee to the doom that others of our foes
Have found before, and free my brother's heart
Of all anxiety. What more of words ?
I challenge thee in sight of gods to loose
My iron hold and free this luckless ape
By force of thy much bepraised darts. If canst,
I shall agree that Sita too will be
Freed from her bowery prison.'[1]

Rama laughed and thus replied :

. . . . . . 'If I cannot cleave in two
Those arms that captured have my friend and brother,
I shall hold myself beaten : I shall fight
No more with thee.'[2]

So saying he sent two arrows which wounded the Rakshasa in his forehead. Blood gushed from his wounds as water from mountain springs, and Kumbhakarna fell unconscious. The touch of warm blood awakened Sugriva from his swoon, and he released himself from the slackened arms of Kumbhakarna ; and like the monkey that he was, he bit his nose and ears and sprang back to where Rama was. The pain brought Kumbhakarna back to consciousness, and bitten with shame and roused to wrath he took his sword and buckler and rushed against Rama and the Vanara troops. The Vanaras died or fled in thousands. Rama disarmed him with his arrows but soon reinforcements came and the battle was prolonged. The Rakshasa host, however, was like stubble before the fire of Rama's darts, and soon Rama was again face to face with Kumbhakarna and asked whether he would now at least submit and join him, or whether he would flee towards Lanka. Though a little disfigured by fancy, and a little wanting in taste in some portions, the spirit of the reply of Kumbhakarna is grand and proud. He said :

'It needs not that I speak of other things :
But can I care to live with disfigured face
E'en like my sister, whom thy brother and thou
Attacked and maimed when she had none

[1] VI xv 281-285. [2] VI xv 286.

To help? . . . The haughty eyes of gods lay quenched
For ages by our arms: that this might last
For ev'r, I prayed my brother to release
Sita, thy spouse: unheeded in the council
Of the wise, my tongue and voice were quenched
For once and all, but this I bore though grief
Did eat my heart. But can I now endure
My life, and shall I seek my death t' escape
When quenched is my nose by feeble foes?
Thou counsel'st flight: but having ta'en the field
For to drink thy blood, and let my brother win
The fair he loves, now shall I move the gods
To laughter by lamentations loud addressed
E'en like my sister to my brother? Although
Thou art the peerless one, unique in all
The worlds, art not a knight immaculate
By instinct come of human birth? Know'st not
The duties of the knight, whate'er his race
Or clime? Then tell me have I other course
Than fall on thee and take thy head from off
Thy trunk?'[1]

So saying he sent a massive rock whirling against Rama but Rama's arrows proved the stronger. Realising now that he could not prevail against Rama, Kumbhakarna thought that the best way in which he could serve the cause of his brother was to destroy as many Vanaras as possible, and so he hurled shields and maces against the Vanaras and killed them by the thousand. But his time was come, and Rama, after tearing down his armour, sent a powerful arrow which brought down his right arm. Says Kamban:

Were heroes ever born like him? He took
His brawny right arm severed in his left,
And roaring like an angry lion, he dashed
Into the Vanar host and felled them down
In heaps. The Vanars fled: the peopled worlds
Now dreading more the severed arm than that
Which yet remained, exclaimed, 'Though Ram doth stand
With Kodand bent, can our Vanar champions bold
Escape their fearful fate today?'[2]

[1] VI xv 328-331. [2] VI xv 341, 342.

The Vanaras were flying for very life: the river of blood that was freely flowing from Kumbhakarna's colossal body floated with many a carcass down to the sea: the amazed gods fled in terror of his fury: but he rushed upon Rama with a force that threw down many a mansion and many a hill and sent back the sea for many a mile. But Rama coolly bent his bow and struck down his other arm also. Kumbhakarna, however, did not fall down or cease his struggle even then. With his feet he kicked and trampled and crushed down yet more thousands of the Vanara army. Soon another arrow flew from the bow-strings of Rama and cut off one of his feet.

But even then, with the remaining leg he leaped about and sent the Vanaras to their doom! The remaining leg also was severed by the darts of Rama, but with his tongue the Rakshasa lifted up the massive rocks that were lying on the field and blew them all with all his might against the enemy and killed many of the Vanaras. Rama was struck with his inexhaustible strength and resource and devotion to his brother. But this feat was the last flicker of the dying forest-fire—the last rumbling of the dying volcano. Even his might was sinking and he lamented thus about the impending fate of his brother:

> 'A thousand Ravan's ev'n cannot suffice
> To stand against my Lord and win: and here
> I lie, an armless, legless trunk, and see
> No way to further aid my brother. A life
> Of endless joy and luxury was his:
> Alas, I see its end approach, brought on
> By lust unholy.'[1]

Kumbhakarna's life of Rajasic activity was now over. The ineffable light of *Sattva* now lighted up his soul. With the advent of this light his habitual affection for Ravana sloughed off his mind and he addressed Rama in these words:

> 'Thou comest of the race of him, my Lord,
> Who weighed his flesh to save a luckless dove:
> Wouldst thou refuse a dying prayer? My brother
> Who has found refuge from our ev'l with thee,
> May he, O Ram, for ever be thy care!
> Though he is Rakshas born, his heart knows not
> Th' iniquity of Rakshas birth. He has
> Now come to thee who art the Ancient One

[1] VI xv 354.

Disguised in princely weeds : I pray thee once
Again, protect him first and last. For Ravan
Who hopes yet to prevail 'gainst thee, does hate
Vibhishan as a traitor black, and will
Attempt to end him though a brother born.
See, therefore, that Vibhishan does not leave
The side of Lakshmana or Hanuman,
Or thy protective wings. Now for myself
I'll make a last request to thee. Let not
The Rishis and the gods deride me, Sire,
For my face deformed : so shoot thy powerful dart
Clean through my neck, and send my severed head
To sink beneath the sea beyond the ken
Of living kind.' [1]

Rama took pity on him and complied with his wish. With one arrow he brought down his head and with another having the force of a thunder-storm, he sent that hill-huge head flying through the air to sink into the ocean.

So ended the mighty Kumbhakarna. Instead of remaining very little more than a sleepy and gluttonous giant as Valmiki has left him, the mighty Rakshasa has become in the hands of Kamban a seer and a *Bhakta*, a tender-hearted brother, and a stern pursuer of duty. He reminds us of Bhishma and Karna in Indian story, and Hector of the Homeric Epic. He sees that his king and brother is fighting for injustice, and that Dharma is on the side of the enemy. In the natural conflict of duties that arises in this situation, he chooses to be true to the salt he had eaten. He foresees his fate, but will not flinch from it, though he knows, and his brother Vibhishana has shown, that he can save himself. He finds that he cannot 'refuse to give his life for him who all these years has cherished' him, 'and now has sent him to the field to fight.' He cannot let Ravana, after having enjoyed prosperity that even the Devas envied, lack a brother to fall with him upon the field of battle. And above all, he cannot brook the idea of singing hallelujah to one who must kill his brother—though that one should be God Himself incarnate. In the end, when he dies, we hear the soft lyre of friendship and brotherly love mingling its strains with the trumpet of battle, and we love him both for his devotion to Ravana and for his affection and tenderness for Vibhishana.

1 VI xv 356-360.

CHAPTER X

THE EPISODE OF HIRANYAKASHIPU

The episode of Hiranyakashipu is one of the few additions that Kamban has contributed to the story of the *Ramayana*.[1] His epic imagination was so filled with the colossal figures of the great Asura and his destroyer the Man-Lion, that he has alluded to them more than a dozen times in his grand similes. But he was not satisfied with these slight references and allusions, and wanted to describe the world-bestriding Asura and the *Avatar* that destroyed him in greater detail. And with his finely intuitive cultivated taste with regard to everything concerning the Architectonics of Poetry, he has placed this episode in the place that is most fitted for it. For what place would be more natural and more fitting for this episode than the speech of Vibhishana in the war-council in which he attempts to advise his brother to make peace with Rama ? Here was an Asura endowed with far greater strength and enjoying greater power than Ravana, and yet he was destroyed by an *Avatar* of Narayana who was now incarnated again as Rama to destroy the evil ones of this

1 Indian readers of this book will, we are certain, feel proud to learn that far-off Paris, who, like Sita in Ravana's isle, had kept her soul and honour untarnished throughout Hitler's occupation, has so rapidly stepped back into her unchallenged position of the Queen of Culture that once again ambassador's of culture from all parts of the world are crowding into her court. There, in Paris, is published an excellent quarterly magazine, HIND, devoted purely to the rich and varied culture of Bharata-Khanda called India. Monsieur S. KICHENASSAMY (*Sakti Sei.*) has contributed to the second issue of the first volume a learned article on *Le Ramayana de Kamban*—the Kamba *Ramayana*—from which we quote certain sentiments here and elsewhere which accord so perfectly with those of Aiyar in the pages of this book. He says:

"Étant donné également que le sujet m'a été posé en ces termes: le Râmâyana de KambaN, je m'efforcerai surtout d'opposer l'œuvre tamoule à l'œuvre sanskrite; cela me permettra d'élucider un point très important : la valeur morale de l'œuvre de KambaN."

Writing with special reference to the chapter on Hiranyakashipu, he voices Aiyar's—nay, the entire Tamil world's—pride when he says:

"Iranyappaḍalam " la chute inévitable du puissant Iranya devant la foi inébranlable de son fils Prahalâda. Ce chapitre inconnu chez Vâlmiki est une création stupéfiante d'art et de génie: l'on eût consenti à predre tout le Ramâyana mais pas ce chapitre, car il couronne la plus belle partie de l'œuvre de KambaN, le Yudda Kânḍam." —(P)

generation. Should not Ravana learn a lesson from the fate of Hiranya ?

This story is grandly described in the Seventh Skandha of the *Bhagavata Purana* and is a great favourite with all *Bhaktas*. But Kamban as usual would not follow his original in all its details, but would only retell the story in his own way, giving his own touches, so that the story becomes as much his own as it is Shuka's [1].

We must say that his description of Hiranya's physical proportions is marred by hyperbolic details of the worst type which defeat their own purpose ; for they do not succeed in making an adequate and satisfying æsthetic impression on the mind. He says :

> The seven oceans of the universe, whose depths it is impossible to sound even with the joined trunks of two of the great mammoths that support the universe, would only wet the feet of the great *Asura* when he walked in them. Where could he bathe ? The waters of the rivers were too little for his colossal body : the waters of the seas were too bitter : the waters from the clouds he would not touch, for they were warm : he would therefore pierce the vault of the sky and bathe in the showers descending from the waters of the universe beyond. The hills of the rising and setting sun were the jewels in his ear-rings. He tried the Mandhara mountain with which the Devas and the *Asuras* had churned the Ocean of Milk to see if he could use it for a walking staff, but finding it too light for him he threw it away.
>
> He had the combined force of all the five elements of creation. He would rule the sun and the moon. He would depute in his whim the god of one element to perform the functions of another. Drunk with power and pride, sometimes he would take the reins out of the hands of *Vayu* and rule the winds and storms ; sometimes he would usurp the functions of *Varuna* and direct the movements of the oceans ; at other times he would do the work of *Indra* or *Agni*, *Yama* or *Nairruti*, and even that of *Ishana*.[2] At every tread of his, the heads would be crushed of the thousand-headed

[1] In Vyasa's Bhagavata, the stories are always put into the mouth of Shuka who tells the stories to king Parikshit.

[2] Indra, Agni, Yama, Nairruti, Varuna, Vayu, Kuber and Ishana are the respective guardian deities of East and the rest of the eight cardinal points.

Adishesha—the primeval Cobra that bears the earth on his shoulders. When he walked, his crown would graze the vault of the sky. The very elements would dissolve and fly away when he strode along.

He ruled not this universe only that we see about us. The universe beyond also acknowledged his sovereignty and only his. Devas and *Yogis, Rishis* and even the Supreme Three—all were his vassals, and would live only by praising and blessing his name. By intense *tapas* he had obtained this awful power, and the blessing that nothing that could even be conceived by the mind should be able to kill him. He had placed his throne on the Meru mountain itself, and from that centre he was ruling tyrannically over the universes without a second or a rival.

Many ages passed thus and at length a child was born to him whom he named Prahlada. While Prahlada was still in the womb, Narada the great *Bhakta* had taught his mother the truth that Narayana was the one supreme God and that love to Him was the only true salvation here and hereafter. The conscious child had stored the teaching in his heart, and from the moment of his birth he became a *Bhakta*—a devotee of the Supreme One. He grew in love and devotion, and in his fifth year he was sent by his father to study under the royal *guru*.[1]

The *guru* began the teaching by asking the boy to pronounce the words 'Worship to Hiranya', for the tyrant in the pride of his heart had ordained that these words should be substituted for the words 'Worship to the One Supreme God Narayana', with which words alone all studies had always been begun before his time. But the child of wisdom closed his eyes, and with tears of joy flowing down his cheeks cried out, '*Aum namo Narayanaya*'—Worship to the Supreme God Narayana. How could the cringing master tolerate such sedition? These words fell like thunder upon his ears, and he cried out:

'Thou hast brought ruin on me, O sinful wretch!' Is not the thought of self and the preservation of their own position safe from the wrath of the tyrant the primary thought and concern of all slave-minded teachers of all ages and climes? Our *guru* then continued,

[1] Preceptor.

'And thou hast dug a grave for thy own self.
And where is it didst learn to despise words
That e'en the gods repeat with loyalty
And love, and to pronounce those cursed words
That thou didst utter even now?'[1]

Prahlada replied,

'I uttered but the name of Him who is
The root wherefrom all Vedas spring. Wherein,
O master, have I sinned? The name pronounced
Hath brought salvation to myself and thee
And even to my father and king.'[2]

The master trembled, and conjured the boy to begin with blessing his father's name. He said,

'Thy father, boy, is the sovereign liege of all:
And ev'n th' ancient one who made the gods
His homages pays to him. Thou must begin
Therefore thy studies with the holy name
Of Hiranya on thy lips. Art wiser than
Thy master? Ruin me not therefore, my boy,
By uttering once again the name that now
Thou utteredest!'[3]

The child could not tolerate this blasphemy, and proclaimed thus his faith:

'I'll honour nought, my master, but the name
Of the Lord Supreme. He has illumed my mind
And ta'en possession of my heart: when He
The Infinite One thus dwells in me, can aught
Be hid from me? If such there be, I'll learn
From thee, so it is not opposed to truth.
Who else is worthy worship but the One
Whose praises fill the Brahman's Ved, whose name
The knowing ones and sages, even gods
Repeat t' escape the bonds of birth? I stand
Upon the rock to which the Vedas lead,

[1] VI iii 24. [2] VI iii 25. [3] VI iii 26.

And jnan [1] and sacrifice. What more is there
For me to know or learn? That bliss is mine
That's earned by those who meditate in caves
And forests, solitary, careless how
They eat or drink or dress. For what shall I
Endeavour more? Behold the men who serve
With loving heart the servants e'en of Him
Who measured with His feet the universe.
Though they should learning lack, their lumined soul
Can pierce the secrets of the Ved; and from
Their honeyed lips would flow ambrosial verse!
Now He has filled my heart, who is my Lord
And also thine, and Lord of all the worlds
And even of Brahma's self: all knowledge, sire,
Is therefore come to me: and for thee too,
O master mine, this is the highest good:
I pray thee, bow to Him!' [2]

The Brahman master trembled with the thought that Hiranya would attribute all these 'seditious' doctrines to his own teaching and put him to death. So he rushed to the *Asura's* presence like a scared man and thus addressed him with many a bow:

'Thy humble servant prays to thee, my lord,
Give ear: thy son has uttered words that I
Cannot pronounce, e'en conceive in thought
Without endangering all my hope of earth
And heaven! And he has refused to read the Ved,
Saying he knows all that there is to know.' [3]

Hiranya could not understand what the teacher meant, and asked him to repeat the words uttered by his son. But the terrified *guru* only mystified him still further by saying,

'If I those words before thee utter, lord,
Words mortal to the ear to hear as venom
Of cobras to the blood, my sinful tongue
Would sure to ashes burn, and the pit of Hell
Would open wide its mouth for me.' [4]

[1] Wisdom.
[2] VI iii 27-33.
[3] VI iii 35.
[4] VI iii 37.

Hiranya therefore ordered his son to be brought before him, and when Prahlada stood before him saluting, he embraced him with tenderness and love and asked him what he had said to provoke the teacher to anger. Prahlada told him,

'I only took the holy name of Him
Of Whom the Vedas witness bore when first
Was heard their sacred sound: and thereunto
I only added this: whoso shall think
Or speak or hear of Him, shall cross the sea
Of misery, and higher good than this
There's none in all the world.'[1]

The words used by the poet to convey the idea contained in the first three verses of Prahlada's reply could also be interpreted to mean,

I only took the holy name of Him
Who stands without a rival, with which name
The great begin the chanting of Ved;

and so Hiranya thought that there was nothing in his son's words for the Brahman to disapprove of. For it was with his name that, according to his ordinances, the chanting of the Vedas were being begun in those days. Yet, thinking that it was better to have it made clear, he asked Prahlada to pronounce the name itself. Then to his great and rising indignation he heard these bold words which his saintly son spoke:

'Wouldst hear the words that fill all worldly wants?
Wouldst hear the words that ope the gates of heaven?
Wouldst hear the words that give to sacrifice
Its virtue and the power to grant our wish?
List then, they're *Aum Namo Narayanaya*—
I bow my head to Narayana, the Lord
Supreme.
Whe'r Brahma, Shiv, or man whoso forgets
This *mantra* has forgot his soul. 'Tis hard
To prove by signs; for they alone can know
Whose eyes see whole, whose heart is free from likes

1 VI iii 40.

And dislikes both. This *mantra* is the boat
That saves us from the eddying whirls of life,
And death, and endless pursuing deeds. It is
A jewel dear to all—the cream of all
There is to know in Ved. And so it is
These words I uttered loud, my father, that
Thou may'st be saved, and I, and all the world
With us.'[1]

The amazed *Asura* could hold his patience no longer and thus burst out :

'This sceptre stern, my boy, beneath whose sway
All worlds have lain in dread for ages past,
Would straight have burned the tongue that spoke and mind
That dared conceive these words seditious! Now speak:
Declare, and quick, which rebel uttered them,
Or taught the same to thee? The sages, seers,
And gods that dwell in all the moving worlds
Do worship nought but these my feet—their vows
And prayers are e'er addressed alone to me,
Their lord. Who told thee he is God, who oft
Has come to try his strength with me, and who,
As oft defeated, has in panic fled,
Thanks to old Garuda's powerful wings, and now
Lies fast asleep somewhere i' the Sea of Milk?
Innumerable as the ocean sands
Are those our fathers who, before I came
To sovereign power, had been destroyed by him:
Can good e'er come to rats, perverse, if they
Shall sing the praises of the hooded snake?
My brother, who could, if he did please, devour
The fourteen worlds, this Vishnu gored to death,
Coming on him in shape a boar. Did I
Beget thee boy, to sing with joy the name
Of him the enemy of our race, whose hands
Are stained with our own blood? Seest thou not me
With power omnipotent endowed? Whence didst
Thou learn, thou luckless wretch, what sight denies
And every other sense, that there is one

1 VI iii 44-46.

Above us who creates, sustains, destroys ?
There is no higher truth than this as Ved
Itself will witness, that our actions yield
Their proper fruit—the good deeds good, and ill
Their ill appropriate. Vishnu, Brahma, Shiv,
Who rose by their austerities to their
Dominions in their proper worlds, have now
By great efflux of time their places lost ;
And by my proper *tapas* I am raised
To sovereign power unrivalled over all
The worlds : success despaired, now none does wish
T' endeavour after it, and all have sought
Refuge from ill beneath my awesome throne !
I've banished from my realms all sacrifice,
And *tapas,* and all hankering after knowledge
Forbidden. Him whom these do falsely praise
Thou dost declare almighty. Who know not
Security themselves, can ev'r they save
Others ? I pardon thee thy childhood's prattle :
But cease henceforth such senseless talk, and learn
In all humility, all that this sage
Will in his wisdom teach.' [1]

Prahlada heard to the end with filial respect, though every word of his father's speech was a javelin to his heart. But when he had ended, he affirmed fearlessly, like Abdiel, the faith that was in his heart, and the truth as his intellect perceived it. He said,

'The seed is the parent of the tree. . . Can we measure His greatness who createth all things within Himself, liveth Himself apart, and yet immanent shineth in all the work of His hands ? He hath none before Him, and none there is after Him. Deathless is He ! . . .

The mind cannot conceive Him—for the Upanishads declare He is beyond the logical intellect. Words cannot describe His nature as He is, nor's there another to whom or which we can compare Him. How then can those who sense Him not uncover His secret ?

He is action and her fruit, and He is ordainer too thereof. Whoso will know His greatness in his heart, will cross the sea of good and evil. . . .

[1] VI iii 47-56.

The cause He is that produces, and He is the effect also that is produced: but there is no *organon* [1] by which thou canst know what He is in Himself. The many see not His wonderful magic.

Behold, He is the scentless, seedless lotus, many-petalled and unique, blossoming on the stalk [2] studded with the fifty sounds—safely lying in the secret cave of all living kind from the Supreme Brahma downwards. . .. .

He came as the single sound undifferentiated, and then evolved as sound triune, and then became the Word [3] . . .

Time He is and Space. He is Cause and Instrument: He is Effect also and its Enjoyer! Virtue He is and the glories that virtue brings. And behold His Power, He contains all creation within Himself as the seed contains the banyan tree.

He is the artist, and the world is His Vina. Within He is, and without, and yet nothing touches Him. And it is He that gives the Vedas.

He is the life of the unique sound *Aum*. He is the Light of the Inner Light. . . . He is the fire and the worlds are the smoke.

He is the garland, and the religions and sects are the flowers thereof. But He is beyond the grasp of the fanatics. For he is the Ocean, and the sectarians know only the wave. And yet He is in the wave also!

And as I feared, father, that thy vast power, and life itself, might vanish by thy contempt for the Supreme Lord, I sang His praises that thy days may be long and thy power may be lasting.' [4]

When Prahlada finished, Hiranya's rising rage burst into flame, throwing the very sun out of his sphere and the heavens out of their foundations. His eyes dropped blood. And, to the terror of all the worlds, he thundered out these words, fierce as the boiling poison of the sea:

1 Instrument.

2 The stalk is the spinal cord. The lotus is the brain. The fifty primary sounds (letters) of the Samskrit alphabet are meditated on by *yogis* in the brain as well as in the different plexuses of the spinal cord.

3 Nada—the mystic sound *Aum*. Also compare:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."—*The Gospel of St. John*—I i.

4 VI iii 58, 59, 62, 64, 69, 70, 72, 74-78.

'Have not I foe enough in him who's sprung
To my misfortune out of my own loins,
And pays his worship and his love to him
Who is my foe of foes ? Put him to death ! '[1]

The ministers of his vengeance rose at once and, taking Prahlada into the open, aimed their most deadly weapons against him. But all of them fell powerless to harm him who in the midst of that iron-storm forgot not the loving utterance of the name of the Lord. When Hiranya was informed of this, he ordered them to light a big fire and throw him into the flames. They obeyed him, but

> even as the words of the chaste Sita cooled the fire to Hanuman when we[2] set fire to his tail, even so did the repetition of the holy name make the fire feel cool to his fair body up to the very marrow of his bones.[3]

When the executioners told Hiranya that fire did not burn his son, he ordered them to throw the God of Fire into a dungeon and the boy into a pit containing the eight venomous cobras. The cobras were, therefore, set on Prahlada, but in whatever part of the body they bit him, drops of ambrosia exuded from the bitten flesh ; and it was the fangs of the cobras that fell off, while he remained scatheless, unforgetful of the holy name.

Hiranya next ordered that an elephant should be driven against him and made to trample him under foot. Indra himself, in fear, supplied his *Airavata*,[4] and the elephant came rushing on him in fury. As he came within earshot Prahlada addressed him thus :

'Remember, father Airavat, *He* dwells
Within the lotus of my heart, who flew
To save thy kinsman struggling in the jaws
Of the fierce crocodile ! '[5]

[1] VI iii 80.

[2] Ravana and his minions—the reader will recollect that Vibhishana is relating the story.

[3] VI iii 86.

[4] The name of Indra's state elephant.

[5] VI iii 93.—Allusion to the story of Gajendra, the lord of elephants, who was saved by Vishnu when he called on His name. Vishnu hurled His discus against the crocodile who had seized the Elephant-king by the leg when he was bathing in a lake. The crocodile was killed and the Elephant was released.

When Airavata heard these words, instead of knocking him down and trampling on him, he fell down on his knees and worshipped him. Hiranya ordered the elephant to be put to death for thus slighting his orders, and so in order to save himself he rose reluctantly and dashed against Prahlada. But lo, when the tusks but touched his golden body they broke to pieces and fell off even as if they were plantain stalks!

Hiranya then tried to drown Prahlada in the sea with a rock attached to his body, but the boy did not sink: he floated even as the Supreme One floats on the banyan leaf during the Great Deluge of the universe. Neither was the cup of poison that he gave him to drink able to kill Prahlada who drank it as if it were very *amrit*.

As nothing else appeared to have power over the child, Hiranya at last determined to kill him with his own hands. As he neared him wild with rage, the divine child fell at his feet and softly said,

> 'My life belongs to Him who made the worlds
> And all that is therein: how canst thou hope,
> My father, to destroy what's His?'[1]

We shall now continue the story in the words of the poet which rise henceforth from height to height of sublimity till the crescendo is reached in the last defiance of Hiranyakashipu.

> Hiranya heard; but still, though full of wrath,
> He did not strike him, curious to see
> If young Prahlad could show his God; and thus
> Addressed he him: 'Thou talkest much, my boy;
> Tell me, if canst, who made the worlds? Is it
> The three who live by praising loud my name?
> Or else is it the Rishis? Or is it
> The gods that have been crushed for once and all?'
> Prahlad replied: ''tis Hari, father, who
> Created all these worlds. Is it the worlds
> Alone He made? 'Tis He that giveth life—
> Our very souls are His. Why, like the scent
> In flowers, and oil in ses'mum seed, He dwells
> Immanent everywhere. I adore, and so
> He shows Himself to me. Thou lovest not,

[1] VI iii 118.

Father, and hence thou seest not Him who killed
Thy golden-eyed brother. Three are His forms,
And three His qualities : His eyes are three,
The sun and the moon and the fire. His worlds are three,
And triune th' Effulgence of His Self.
And He is the witness argus-eyed, Who sees
Delighted, th' eternal dance of transient life.
And this is the final truth that Vedas teach.'

Hiranya smiled contemptuous, and said,

'Thou say'st, though himself only one, he dwells
In every object seen in all this vast
Multiple universe. We'll test this first
And then decide what's best for us to do.
Now show me him if he is in this pile ?'
'What of this column, father ?' said Prahlad :
'Thou'lt find Him in a span of space ; divide
An atom int' an hundred parts, and thou
Wilt find my God in every one of them :
He is in Meru hill ; thy very words,
I say, are filled with Him : and thou wilt find
'Fore long my every word a solemn truth.'
'Enough of words,' Hiranya spoke in wrath,
'Discover me him inside this pillar here,
Who, thou declar'st and rebel gods believe,
Pervades this universe : if thou dost fail
I'll fall on thee as on the elephant does
The lion, and tearing thee to pieces, drink
Thy blood and eat thy flesh !' The wise one thus
Softly replied : 'Thou canst not kill me, Sire !
But this I vow : if at any spot at which
Thou place thy hands, my blessed Lord do not
Reveal Himself, I'll myself end my life !
For e'en when I address this solemn vow
To Him, if He would not respond to my prayer,
And even after that I cling to my life,
I shouldn't deserve to see my God, for then
My love could not be perfect.' 'Be it so !'
Hiranya cried in wrath and with his arm,
The home of victory, he struck against
The massive column high a thundering blow.

He struck, and lo the heavens opened wide,
The universal globe asunder burst,
And rumbling came the laugh of the Man-Lion fierce,
Tremendous, ominous ! When Prahlada heard
Him laugh Whom even Brahma seeks in vain,
He danced for joy, his eyes with tears filled,
He chanted loud His holy name, and hands
In worship joined above his tender head. . . .
Hiranya heard, and wild with rage exclaimed,
'Say, who art thou that daredest laugh ? Art thou
The god of whom this boy doth prate ? And hast
Thou found thy ocean small and refuge sought,
Thou despicable, within this pillar here ?
Come forth if thou wouldst fight with me, Come forth !'
The pillar burst, the Lion stood self-revealed ;
He grew and filled this universe, and those
Around, and who can know and tell of all
His wondrous doings in the great Beyond ?
The globed vault did burst, and from the depths
Above to those below all space was torn
Sheer ! . . . .[1]

Continues the poet :

Have any the science to count the arms that the Man-Lion had ? The *Asura* force of ten thousand thousand millions was annihilated by Him, and His terrific form confronted every single *Asura* separately with one head and two arms and three fiery eyes.

But can evil ever come to the good ? While He was tearing to pieces all the evil *Asuras* with His terrific claws, He protected all good souls from harm by keeping them within Himself even as a mother does her infant.

He ate up alive the elephants and the horses and the fighting *Asuras*, and then drank up the oceans seven with all their myriad living beings, and crunched between His teeth the very thunderbolts of heaven. Seeing His unquenchable rage Dharma herself trembled for her safety !

Not one *Asura* he left alive in all the three worlds ! Not even the foetus in the wombs of the *Asura* women were spared ! And seeing no more *Asuras* alive in this universe,

1 VI iii 119-130.

behold, some arms of His were searching for them in the worlds Beyond!

Thus before the mind could so much as realise what was happening, the world-pervading Man-Lion destroyed all the *Asuras* excepting alone Prahlada who was the staff of the Gods, and his father; now He strode towards the place where the great *Asura* was standing.

> And there he stood, vast like the Meru mount,
> His diamond-studded sword unsheathed for fight,
> His buckler hiding sheer the heavens from view.
> At his thundering shout the Devas shuddered, and
> The mountains trembled and the seven seas.
> Prahlada saw his dauntless father stand
> With firm-set lip prepared to meet the shock
> Of the advancing Lion, and nearing him
> He said, 'E'en after seeing the strength abnorm
> Of the Lord Supreme, O father, why wouldst not
> The truth perceive? E'en now thou canst submit
> To Him: and when thou fallest at His feet,
> He would forgive thy evil deeds of old.'
> Hiranya frowned, and thus defiance hurled:
> 'Listen, ingrate! In sight of thee I will
> Cut down the Man-Lion's branching arms and feet,
> And then I'll give my sword thy blood to drink!
> And when it shall have nobly done my hests,
> I'll pay my homage to that matchless steel.
> Hast ever seen this head obeisance make
> To living being? Not e'en to soften heart
> Of woman has it ever yet bowed, thou boy!'[1]

So saying Hiranya laughed a mighty laugh. A shudder ran through the worlds when they heard the laugh which they had ever known to be the forerunner to his terrible deeds of valour. As the Man-Lion approached him, Hiranya advanced to meet Him, and they closed, the Man-Lion with his uncountable arms and the *Asura* armed with his sword of victory. They rose above all the worlds into primeval space for freedom of movement! And what could we compare their forms to? The *Asura* resembled that vast Meru mountain, and the blessed Lord resembled—all else

[1] VI iii 144-146.

besides. The Lord of Illusion, with his arms rising tier on tier looking like waves on waves, and with his world-quaking roar, resembled the Ocean of Milk when it was being churned, and the *Asura* resembled the mountain which churned it.

But how long can a mortal hold against the Supreme Lord in his terrific form, and fighting hand to hand? With one mighty hand, at length, the Man-Lion took hold of Hiranya's feet and whirled him round and round. His crown and jewels struck against the circular walls of the universe and fell shattered to pieces; his ear-jewels called *kundalas* fell one to the east and the other to the west, and remain to this day as the rocks of the rising and the setting sun. And it is his jewels that give their brilliance to the sunrise and the sunset even now. At length, at the time of the twilight which is neither day nor night, the Man-Lion sat at the gate of Hiranya's palace, laid him on his thighs and tore open his entrails with his spear-like claws, and freed the Devas from their thraldom.

Hiranyakashipu is the analogue of the Miltonic Satan in Indian story. Although in the description of the physical form of the *Asura* Kamban falls below Milton, who with a few of his characteristic touches gives the impression of hugeness without offending the *eye* of imagination, Kamban has perfectly succeeded in impressing us with the supreme pride and consciousness of illimitable power of the great *Asura*. The gods were nothing to Hiranya. He alone was the undisputed master of the universe, and none deserved worship but himself. Even when he sees the terrific Man-Lion destroy his army in a trice, his heart does not shrink; on the contrary his words assume greater firmness and pride. And his end too is equally heroic, contending face to face with God, and requiring Omnipotence Itself to destroy him.

The story of Hiranya in the *Bhagavata* is more didactic than artistic in composition and purpose, though some of the highest flights of poetry are to be found in it. But Kamban gifted as he is with a highly dramatic imagination, would introduce his own changes in it in order to bring the dramatic into full play. Thus, while Shuka, the narrator of the *Bhagavata* stories, makes Prahlada speak his mind for the first time before his father who is made to casually ask him what he had learned, Kamban makes him repeat the holy name of Narayana before his master at the very commencement of the instruction. This gives our poet the opportunity of making the teacher tremble for his safety at hearing the banned words, and of extracting the full poetic value out of

this circumstance. Again, according to the original, after this incident, the boy is sent away by the father, after a slight reprimand, to the masters to learn the proper doctrines. When, after sometime had elapsed, Hiranya calls for him and again questions him, Prahlada replies in the same strain, and in his wrath Hiranya orders him to be tortured and killed. Prahlada, however, as in our story, escapes miraculously from all the cruel tortures to which he is subjected. After this, at the request of the teachers, Hiranya again sends the boy to them to learn the orthodox doctrines. This is clearly against all poetic probability, for how could Hiranya or the teachers believe that Prahlada could be converted after all these cruelties and miraculous escapes? There at the school, instead of being converted to his father's view of the universe, himself converts his classmates to the love of Hari. The teachers, therefore, bring him back to Hiranya saying that his conversion is hopeless. The last scene before the striking at the pillar too, is not so well developed by Shuka as by Kamban who brings out the contrast between the wrathful and proud *Asura* and his calm and devotion-filled son in a few but intensely worked up stanzas. Kamban again would make the Man-Lion finish the *Asura* army before coming to the leader Hiranyakashipu, and thus keep the climax to the very end. The challenge of Hiranya to the Man-Lion in Kamban is, again, more in character than the last words that Shuka puts into his mouth. The words that fall from the lips of Hiranya in the *Bhagavata* after the appearance of the Man-Lion are only these :

> "What? Most probably this Hari, with his great cunning has assumed this powerful body with the intention of destroying me."

And how feeble these words read when compared with the first challenge of the *Asura* in Kamban!

The last request of Kamban's Prahlada to his father to submit to the God makes him more loveable than Shuka's Prahlada who does not speak to his father after the Man-Lion had appeared; while the last reply of Kamban's Hiranya to his son makes him look grander than the *Asura* in the *Bhagavata.*

Potanna in his *Prahlada Charitra,* as perhaps everywhere in his grand redaction of the *Bhagavata,* has not made any changes in the story as told by Shuka. His version is a close paraphrase in Telugu of the original *Bhagavata,* expanding certain leading ideas and images in the narration, but all-religiously keeping to the very order in the development of the story. He has added

no new trait or colour to the original sketch. But Kamban's imperial imagination must needs remelt even the best minted coin of the other sovereigns in the realm of poetry, and put its own impress and superscription on the reminted gold. And so we have in this episode, Hiranya expanded to even more colossal proportions, and a Prahlada more tender than the creations of Vyasa and Shuka.[1]

[1] *See* foot-note 1 on page 153

CHAPTER XI

VALI AND SUGRIVA

In the character of Hiranyakashipu Kamban has shown to us unequalled prowess and valour combined with extreme pride refusing to acknowledge the supremacy of Almighty Power till destroyed by It in Its terrible aspects. In this chapter we shall see his presentation of valour and powers of the same degree but combined with many generous and noble qualities, and yet which was extinguished by Shri Rama for a single delinquency. We shall devote the greater part of the chapter to Kamban's Vali.

After Ravana had carried off Sita, Rama and Lakshmana, as the reader knows, went southwards and searched for her everywhere in the impenetrable forests of Dandaka. At length a great *tapasvini*[1] named Shaphari told them that a Vanara called Sugriva who was residing on the Rishyamuka hill would be of great help to them in their search, and they accordingly sought him on the hill. Although Vali was the king of the Vanaras, and the more powerful of the two brothers, and Sugriva was in hiding for fear of Vali, the saintly woman considered that Vali who had unjustly driven Sugriva out of his kingdom and deprived him of his wife, and was even after his life, was undeserving of Rama's friendship; and that was why she sent him to Sugriva in preference to Vali.

After much travel Rama and Lakshmana came to the hill. Sugriva came to see them after ascertaining through Hanuman that they were not men sent by Vali to kill him. After preliminaries were over, Rama told Sugriva that he sought his help in his great difficulty.[2] On the other side Sugriva replied that he was being pursued and hunted by Vali, his brother, and that it was Rama that must protect him from the latter. Rama pitied his helpless condition, and impressed with his generous nature swore eternal friendship with him.

After this, Valmiki makes Rama and Lakshmana go to Sugriva's home of their own accord, and Sugriva to casually

1 feminine of *tapasvi*—one who performs spiritual austerities.

2 Valmiki would make Lakshmana tell Sugriva that Rama had come to take refuge under him—*Sharanam gatah*.

mention that he had been even robbed of his wife by Vali. But Kamban with his greater dramatic skill represents Sugriva as inviting Rama after the swearing of friendship to his cottage on the hill, and Rama as asking him whether he also had lost his wife like himself, seeing that there was no Vanarini in the cottage to serve the guests. Here too he takes care that Sugriva does not tell his story himself in reply to Rama as in Valmiki, but makes Hanuman as his chief councillor to tell it for him and thus saves Sugriva from personally referring to his misfortune as *hrita bharyah*—one who has been robbed of his wife. Hanuman describes in detail Vali's exploits and strength and ends by saying that Vali had taken away Sugriva's wife.

The moment that he heard the last words, Rama's eyes grew red with rage, for

> Could he who gave away a crown that was
> By right his own to a brother to enjoy—
> Could he forgive an elder brother, who
> Had robbed the younger of his wife by force,
> And now was hunting him unto death ? [1]

So Rama swore to Sugriva that he would kill Vali with his bow and restore his wife to him and make him king of Kishkindha. In order to give Sugriva confidence in his strength, Rama destroyed with one arrow of his the seven *sala* trees that could never be cut down by any living being, and cleared the ground of the colossal skeleton of Dundubhi the Asura, who had fought with and been defeated by Vali. Sugriva was now convinced of Rama's capacity to destroy Vali. He therefore agreed to go and challenge Vali on his hill, the arrangement being that while they were engaging each other Rama should send his arrow and despatch Vali.

When the challenge of Sugriva reached his ear, Vali rose from his bed and frowning listened again. When he understood that it was his brother that was calling him to fight he laughed a laugh that threw the fourteen worlds off their foundations and sent them whirling into outer space. His usual anger against his brother soon took possession of his heart,, and he now appeared like the ocean boiling for the final deluge on the Day of Dissolution. The mountain on which he stood sank under his

[1] IV ii 112.

weight. His eyes glistened with the fire of his hatred, shaming the aurora of the north. When he smacked his arms with his palm, as wrestlers do, the thunderbolts of heaven dropped down, and the very hill on which he stood split to pieces. Even the God of Death was terrified at his aspect, for he looked at that moment like the Time Spirit brooding over and directing the destruction of all creation on the final day, or like the boiling mass of poison that rose from the ocean when he helped in churning it for the gods.

He was just starting to go to answer the challenge of his brother when Tara his wife came in his way and tried to dissuade him from going.

> 'Stop me not,' he said, checking her: 'stop me not, O wife, fair even as the mountain peacock of the noblest breed! I will answer his challenge and return to thee after drinking his life, even as I churned the ocean and got *amrit* in olden days!'[1]

But she persisted saying,

> 'Sugriva knows thy strength by proof, my lord,
> And ne'er can stand against thy iron fists.
> He is not born again to hope afresh,
> Nor has he greater strength acquired to-day
> By blessing of the Gods; if now he dares
> To challenge thee, it is because he has
> An ally strong enough to give him hopes
> Of easy victory.'[2]

Vali only laughed at her fears and said,

> 'Even if all the three worlds, Tara, stood
> Combined against me they are bound to fail!
> Canst thou forget the day when Asuras
> And Devas sought to churn the Sea of Milk?
> The Mandh'ra mountain was the churning rod,
> And Vasuki the mighty cobra was
> The string! They pulled, but had not strength enough
> To turn the awful mount. I saw their plight
> And moved with pity helped, and lo! the sea
> Did yield his glories to my mighty arm.

1 IV v 14. 2 IV v 15

Though countless are the foes both Asuras
And Gods, who tried their strength with me, has one
Till now prevailed 'gainst me ? Even the God of Death
Doth tremble at my name : Who then could come
To help Sugriv ? Should there be such a fool
As loves to call on his own head his doom,
Then know that whoso faces me in war,
One half his force, and blessings earned by him
From Gods do pass to me sheer : such the power
That Shiv has blessed me with. Fear not, therefore,
My Tara, give me leave !'[1]

But Tara's fears were not dispelled. She had heard too much from her servants to be satisfied with Vali's assurances. She therefore begins,

'My lord, I learn from trusty servants shrewd
That he has found a great ally in Ram
Who for his sake has sworn to end thy life
To-day.'[2]

Vali had heard so much of Rama's nobility and chivalry and brotherly and filial love that he had come to look upon him as the ideal hero. So when Tara spoke of him as conspiring with Sugriva to kill Vali, Vali could not at all believe it. Not merely that. He could not brook to hear the ideal of his heart vilified, as he thought he was, by these words of Tara. Hence, before she could say all that she had heard, he cut her speech short and spoke to her these angry words :

'What hast thou said, with that blaspheming tongue
Of thine, Tara ? Know'st thou not Ram is born
To show the way of virtue to the world
That has forgotten Dharm, and crying loud
For a saviour in vain, has helpless sunk
In dark despair ? But that thou art a woman
And hast in ignorance erred, thou shouldst have died
For this blasphemy ! How will he think on this,
Whose eye can see beyond this transient life ?
Can Dharma falsify itself, that's born
To save all living kind ? Though all the world
Lay at his feet, he gave his crown away

[1] IV v 20. [2] IV v 21.

Smiling to his brother at the bidding cruel
Of his step-mother. In lieu of blessing him
For the grandeur of his soul, do I now hear
Thee slander Rama? E'en should all the worlds
Come thronging on and rush on him at once,
Does he an ally need beside his bow
To battle by his side? Then thinkest thou
That he would hanker after alliance
With a worthless ape? He does his brothers love
Ev'n as his life: would he then aim his darts
At me, when I and my brother are engaged
In combat to decide on rights upon
The sward? Know he's a sea of mercy sweet!
Rest here a while therefore; within a trice
I'll beat Sugriv, and send him to his doom,
And scattering all who come to his aid
I'll join thee: dispel thy fears![1]

Tara feared to say more, and Vali dashed down the hill to accept the challenge of his brother. When he stood before Sugriva with the hill behind his back, he looked like the Man-lion who came out of the massive column when it was struck by the great and terrific *Asura*. They did not waste time in mere words, but started to wrestle with each other with many a war-shout.

Rama who was ambushed behind a clump of trees close by with Lakshmana, was amazed at their size and force, and said to his brother,

'What oceans can we liken to their frames?
What clouds? What storms? Or What deluging[2] fire?
And can one universe hold two such clouds,
Deluges, storms, or frowning seas?'[3]

But Lakshmana was then thinking of something else. He said,

. . . . 'Sugriva has
A Yama brought to end his brother: though
Their fight is worthy praise, my heart is pained
To see this fratricidal fight, and so
I cannot judge in calmness, brother!'

1 V v 22-27.
2 The Fire of Hindu mythology which consumes the world during the Deluge. (P)
3 IV v 31.

He ceased.
But still his heart returned upon its theme,
And thus unburdened he his mind: 'They say
It is unwise to put our faith in those
That are unnatural: when he can harden
His heart against a brother, and fall on him
As on a foe, what can his loyalty
Be worth to strangers, brother?'[1]

For this once even Kamban's Rama talks like a cynic. He began by asking,

'Can we expect ideal morals among
These foolish apes?'[2]

But as Lakshmana's reference to brotherly love brought the memory of Bharata, the ideal brother, to his mind, he added, not without intending a slight hit at Lakshmana who in the pride of his loyalty to Rama was unjust to Bharata,

'And then, my child, if all
Were like in their devotions to their brothers,
How can my Bharata be placed the first
I' th' list of loyal brothers?'[3]

And then he continued thus:

'And
O hero of the well-developed arms
Which show like rocks armed with the banded bow,[4]
Wherever thou go, the lovers of virtue are
But few; the many love her not. We have
To take men as they are: and, brother, is there
A man of whom we can say, 'lo, here is
A man without a single flaw?'[5]

[1] IV v 32, 33. [2] IV v 34. [3] IV v 34.

[4] By this flattering epithet, Rama intends to heal the wound that his previous words must have inflicted on the heart of Lakshmana.

[5] IV v 35. Rama here hints that they themselves are engaged in a questionable transaction at this very time, though he would not withdraw from it now.

In the meantime Vali and Sugriva had well warmed to their fight. The poet describes the combat grandly, and we shall try to give some parts of that description to the reader :

> They looked like two mammoths wrestling, like two rocks dashing against each other, like two lions trying to tear each other to pieces. Some time they stood facing each other with steady feet, some time they whirled round and round each other like a potter's wheel. The earth could not bear their pressure when arm pressed against arm ; fire sparks were thrown out when foot knocked against foot. Their quick blows and guards and locks recalled the sheen of the lightning in heaven. And they were like planets colliding with each other in the sky.
>
> We have not seen sea fronting sea, or mountain pit itself against mountain, or Wrath taking shape and boiling, dividing itself in two. Then what else can we compare their wrestling to ?
>
> The fire burning in and dropping from their eyes burned the clouds and reduced rocks to a mass of ashes. The mammoths of the cardinal points trembled for their lives, the gods who had come to witness the fight fled away in terror . . . .
>
> Seeing them knock each other down unmindful of the blood that was pouring from their bruises and wounds, the bystanders wondered and asked each other, 'Are they struggling in the sky or are they on the peak of the hill ? Are they on the earth or are they gone beyond the universe ? Or are they within our own eyes ?'
>
> The smack of their arms cleaving the air like the tidal waves on the stormy sea, was heard to the very ends of the universe : the resonance of their fists striking at each other's arms and chests resembled the full-mouthed thunder of the Day of Dissolution.
>
> When they struck with their fists on each other's chests, it was like the hammer of the mighty-armed smith falling on a massive piece of heated iron on the anvil. Veritable sparks flew from their iron chests thus struck.
>
> They would press each other with their chests, aim kicks at each other with their mighty legs, throw each other down with force with their hands ; they would join each other and knock each other down with fists, and uprooted trunks of trees, and rocks. They would roar with wrath and glare at each other.

They would lift each other with their arms and throw each other down, they would wet their hands in the blood rushing from their blows, they would whirl round each other like mighty kites flown in the wind, they would knit their arms and body round each other, they would hug each other and fall.

They would twist their tails round each other's bodies and draw them tight till the bones cracked and broke, they would lock each other with their legs and slip from each other's locks, they would pierce each other's bodies with their lance-like claws, and leave cave-deep wounds upon each other's mountain-huge bodies.[1]

At length Vali had the upper hand, and with all his force aimed a blow against Sugriva which sent him flying into the air. As Vali also had been terribly exhausted by the struggle he did not pursue him, but stopped there and rested on the ground taking breath. Sugriva limped on to where Rama was hiding and fell at his feet. No words were needed from Sugriva to tell Rama of his condition. Rama told him that he did not aim his arrow during the late struggle as he could not distinguish between them both, and asked him to wear a garland of flowers and resume the fight, when, he said, distinguishing between the two he would aim at Vali and bring him down.

So again Sugriva came and engaged with Vali who with a superior smile—which but lightly concealed his frown terrifying to the very God of Death—struck at his brother's life-spots with all his might. Sugriva vomited blood, and blood flowed in torrents from his eyes and nose and ears also. Unable to bear the punishment, he looked towards the spot where Rama stood concealed. But Vali, with the consciousness of certain victory filling his heart, heartlessly followed up his success with further knock-out blows. And then he gripped firmly Sugriva's neck with one hand and his hip with the other, and lifting him sheer poised himself to dash him with a terrific force upon the rock.

Just at that minute Rama, who was watching his opportunity with his bent *Kodanda*, placed an arrow on the rest, drew back the string and sent the dart flying with a mighty force. Says the poet,

> Who can conceive the force of that fiery dart ?
> Great Vali's frame which had the strength combined

[1] IV v 36-38, 40-43, 45-48.

Of earth and water, fire and wind, was pierced
By it ev'n as is pierced a plantain ripe
By a sharp needle ! [1]

Vali's strength failed. And he fell even as the Meru mountain would fall uprooted on the Day of Dissolution by the whirlwind. And as he fell, the grip of his hands loosened releasing Sugriva ; but immediately he caught the feather side of the mortal arrow with his hands and struggled with the added might of his hind paws and tail in order to stop it from boring its way through his adamantine frame. The very God of Death bowed his head in admiration when he saw the force of his will and the might of his limbs even at that moment. In his wrath at being thus ambushed and shot at, he would wish to demolish the very vault of the heaven, and attempt to rise in order to strike at it ; he would think of destroying the world to its very bounds ; he would plough the ground with his iron limbs and desire to bore the earth down to its very root.

As the arrow was still boring into his body he would wonder who could have sent that weapon against him. 'May it be the Gods,' he would think to himself. But soon he would give up that thought asking himself, 'have they the force to handle such a missile ?' Again he would ask himself who could it be ? And smile at his inability to fix upon his assailant. And then he would declare it must be the deed of one who has the power of the Supreme Three. Again he would wonder,

'Is it the disc of Vishnu or the lance
Of blue-necked Dhurjati [2] ? Ev'n thunderbolt
Of Indra, and the lance of Kartikey
Whose point has bored through rocks, do lack the force
To pierce my chest ! What can it be, O what ?'
Again he struggled to pull it out saying to himself,
'There stands no bow that can this fell missile
Propel. Or, did a Rishi send it winged
With his curse ?' [3]

So saying he bent forward and then helping his paws and tail with his jaw, drew it out sufficiently to see that it was only an arrow. As soon as he saw it, he determined to draw it out completely and see who aimed it against him, for all great warriors carve their names upon their arrows in order to give their enemies

1 IV v 57. 2 Siva. 3 IV v 64, 65.

the chance of knowing by whom they were attacked and challenging them if they so desire.

At length the hero of the dauntless heart
Drew out the arrow ; Gods and Asuras
Who saw that wondrous feat felt new force thrill
In their limbs : for who can help admiring strength ?
Out rushed the blood resounding even like
The sea in flood-tide ; and it flowed past rocks
And woods as if it wished to seek the sea.
Sugriva saw the blood out-rushing like
A mountain geyser from the rock-like chest
Of Vali : and he was much moved despite himself :
The tie of birth was stronger than his hate
Implacable, and so with scalding tears
Cascading from his eyes he fell upon
The ground senseless. [1]

In his wrath Vali forgot his first thought and tried to break the arrow, the head of which was still sticking in his body, but it would not break even to his mighty hands. He now remembered again his original intentions, and turned the portion that had been drawn out towards his eyes in order to see whose name was engraved upon its stem. And what did he see ?

He saw the name which is the Word, the seed
From which sprang all the worlds : the glory which gives
Its own self as the highest meed to those
Who meditate thereon : the healing drug
To th' ills incurable called earthly life :
He saw with 'is eyes the sacred *mantra* Ram—
Sweet to the eyes to see and ears to hear—
Carved on the dreadful dart. He saw and laughed
And blushed as thus he spoke : 'By birth of Ram
Who has disgraced the name of soldier and
His bow, great Surya's race, alas, has lost
Its name for Dharm which e'er was known to be
Its shield ! Is it for this he left his home
And took like saint or sage to forest life ?' [2]

Meantime his pain became more and more intense. Now his head would fall limp on the ground. Now he would laugh an explosive laugh. He would again fall to musing and say, 'perhaps

[1] IV v 67-69. [2] IV v 71, 72.

this also may be an act of virtue, who knows?' Now he would roll in pain 'even as the elephant fallen into the trap-pit prepared by the hunter, with the spear still sticking in his gigantic frame.' And he asked himself,

> 'If he swerves from the right what can we say of the common run of men? Verily he has acted worse than myself.' [1]

But while he was saying these words aloud, He appeared, whose name is always mentioned the first in the list of righteous men and kings and who incarnated himself as man in order to establish righteousness on earth. Vali saw that form, looking as if a blue cloud laden with rain had descended from the sky, adorned with many a fresh-blown lotus, and with the rainbow gracing its body. And as he came near he looked him straight in the face and addressed him these words frowning:

'O Rama, Fate indeed has blindly made
Thee son of him who threw away his life
For honour's sake and truth's; but shouldst thou too
Have seen the light before the saintly Bharat?
Thou punishest evil deeds: but do they cease
To be ill deeds when thou art thyself doer? . . .

'Can any count thy blessings? Learning, birth,
Beauty, and valour are all thine; and thou
Art heir to a sceptre wielding power o'er all
The worlds! And thou hast shown the strength and skill
Of thine arm even now: were all these given
To thee alone to bring eternal shame
Upon the name of Knight? and thou art wise,
I've heard it said!

'All highly virtues come
By instinct to the children of thy race:
How then couldst thou this deed of shame commit?
I fear thy mind has lost its balance, since
Thou didst from Jan'ka's swan-like daughter part,
Who was as life to thee and very soul!

'Now tell me, Ram, has Manu anywhere
Ordained that if a Rakshas parts thy wife
From thee, thou must at once destroy the king
Of apes? Where's gone thy tenderness, O man?

1 IV v 74.

And how have I offended thee? If thou
Should run thus after infamy, on whom
Should Glory shed her rays?

'In all this wide
World ocean-girt, should th' Age of Iron dawn
Alone upon an ape? Are equity
And right reserved alone for feeble ones?
I did forget; when Might committeth sin
Doth not the world bestow on it a crown?

'And who can beat thy glory? For thou gavest
A kingdom to thy brother at Ayodh!
And here in jungles wild, to balance that
Thou hast my kingdom on my brother here
As gift bestowed!

'Thou hast now thyself shown, O Ram, that power
Can work its will, unjust or just, secure:
But say, if thou art right in killing me,
Because thou couldst thy arrow aim unseen,
Canst thou at all the Rakshas king accuse
Of carrying off thy spouse by force or guile?

'When two in duel stand engaged, the just
Regard them both with equal eye: but if
A man is moved towards one, and hid behind
A bush, does shoot the other down with sharp
And pointed arrows aiming at the heart,
Is it an act of Dharm?—or something else?

'It is not valour thou hast shown, or love
Of equity; there is no feud betwixt
Thy house and mine; my body did not press
Thy earth with its intolerable weight; and sure
Thou wouldst not call thy sinful deed a deed
Of mercy: what then was in thy mind, O Ram?

'If thou didst hanker after an ally
To fight the war against the Rakshas king,
What wisdom led thee turn thy back upon
The tusker roaming fearless o'er the wilds
And kneel thee down before a puny hare?

'It is the moon alone that had a spot
Till now upon her face: the sun remained
A stainless globe of light. But thou hast ta'en

Thy birth in his thrice glorious house, and lo,
He beats the moon in the blackness of his spot!

'Are not ashamed to show thy face as man
And warrior, who hast laid a trap for me,
And lying concealed behind a bush, hast aimed
A mortal dart against my chest, when I
But came to meet a foe that challenged me?
Thy conduct gives the lie to the learning which
They say thou dost possess: thy deed has brought
Disgrace upon thy great forbears! for, Man!
Thou hast not killed Vali, but hast destroyed
The fence that shields the seedling Dharm from ill!

'O fie on thee! A foe has carried off
Thy spouse, while on thy idle shoulder lies
That bow mocking thy valour. Is't only good
In unfair fight concealed for shooting down
An unarmed foe?'[1]

Thus did Vali address his bitter reproaches to Rama who was standing before him calm and unperturbed the while Vali's words were coming on like sharp-pointed arrows. When Vali had exhausted all his sarcasms and invectives, Rama justified himself as follows:

'When thou hadst gone after thy foe, O Vali, inside the mountain cave, and days innumerable passed without any trace of thee, Sugriva desired to follow thy footsteps and look for thee; but the councillors of thy state prevented him and desired him to assume the crown. He protested that he must fight and die ending the enemy that must have killed thee, his brother, and that he would not think of ascending the Vanara throne. But thy sage ministers and generals, and ancients would not allow him to have his way, and crowned him king of Kishkindha. When thou returnedest victorious, he was glad, and he explained to thee how he came to sit upon the throne. But thou got'st enraged and desired'st to kill him though he prayed to thee as a suppliant to spare him. Although he fled to countries far and wide, thou didst not take pity on him who is thy own mother's son. It is only the curse of the Rishi Matanga that checked thee from seeking him on yonder hills where he had at length sought refuge.

[1] IV v 76-84, 86-90.

. . . . 'Thou talkest of mercy and gentle birth and equity and valour: depriving another of his wife—is it mercy? Or nobility of birth? or justice? or valour? The arrogant tyranny that fights without cause, and pitiless cruelty towards the weak are the chief unpardonable crimes against the laws of chivalry. And lust towards the wife of another is the highest crime against Dharma. This is the conclusion of the wise. Thou knowest the Dharma and understandeth what is right and what is wrong. And still thou didst not care for Dharma or the right. For if thou hadst cared, wouldst thou have desired the dear wife of thy brother? Because of all this, and because thy brother has come to me a friend, dear as life, I shot my dart at thee'. 'For,' concluded Rama,

'It is my ever-pressing vow to help
Th' oppressed, the poor, and those forlorn.'[1]

Against this elaborate counter-attack Vali defended himself thus:

'Brahma, O sire, has not ordained for us Vanaras the same laws of marriage that he has established for you men, amongst whom the chastity of women is a most cherished possession. He has made us to mate as we please. There is no marriage amongst us, nor conduct based on the Vedas, but what comes out of our own inclination of the moment. Where then have I offended against Dharma, O Rama?'[2]

Rama now clinched his argument, repudiating the self-justification of Vali in this wise:

'Thou call'st thyself a brute; but as thou art
The son of Indra, king of gods, and canst
Distinguish right from wrong, who can accept
Thy specious words, unworthy of a king?
'Tis not the body but the mind that rules
The moral life. Canst thou be called a brute
Ignoring right and wrong, who know'st the ways
Well-trodden by the wise of austerities?
Can we that tusker class with brutes, who when
The savage crocodile did grip his leg
Called on the Lord Supreme, and for his trust
And love was blest with ever-lasting life?

[1] IV v 92-102. [2] IV v 104, 105.

And he, my noble father, who did fight,
Moved by his love of Dharm, to save my spouse
Lamenting in the enemy's chariot,
And falling has attained the hero's heaven,
Was not he born a vulture in form and shape ?

'They alone are brutes who know not right from wrong.
Hast thou not shown by words that have e'en now
Fall'n from thy mouth, that there is not a truth
In all the moral codes that thou ignor'st ?
If one cannot the right from wrong discern,
He is a brute though bearing human form.
But even brutes the wise look on as gods
When they do shape their life on Manu's laws.
By great devotion to the God [1] whose lance
Did quench the might of Yam, thou hast been blessed
With strength combined of all the elements four.
But many by their later sins do fall
From heights that good deeds once had earned for them :
While not a few there are who have retraced
Their steps from sin, and have become great saints
And even gods. So beings rise or fall
By their own deeds, or good or ill : thou know'st
This truth, and yet thou hast thy brother's house
To ruin brought and hast destroyed his peace ! ' [2]

Vali was now convinced that he deserved to die for the great and unpardonable wrong that he had done to his brother. But being brave himself, and knowing Rama to be the very embodiment of valour, he could not understand why Rama took the cowardly expedient of shooting him unawares. So he asked Rama,

'O thou of perfect rectitude, I grant all that thou hast said : but why hast thou shot me, concealed behind a bush, like a base and cruel hunter shooting down a beast ? ' [3]

Rama had no real reply to this pertinent question. His action could be explained to Vali only by a specious reason.[4] So Kamban takes care that Rama does not answer this question himself, and

1 Shiva. 2 IV v 111-115. 3 IV v 116.

4 The real reason is that if Rama faced Vali, half his strength would go over to Vali in accordance with the blessing he had received from Shiva. So Rama could not use all his normal strength while Vali will get a new accession of strength which would have successfully prevented Rama's arrow from entering his body and killing him.

makes Lakshmana take it upon himself to reply to it. Lakshmana said,

'When first thy brother refuge sought with us
From thy unrighteous rage, my brother swore
That he would send thee to the halls of Yam.
He feared that thou too, should he show his face
To thee, might haply wish to save thyself
And fall a suppliant at his feet;[1] and so
It is that he concealed himself to aim
His dart at thee.'[2]

The generous-hearted and, therefore, simple-minded Vali questioned no further. He saw that Rama was the Lord of the earth and heaven and felt that he could never do an unrighteous act. So he bowed to Rama and thus addressed him:

O thou who art th' embodiment of right!
From e'en the way that thou hast dealt with us
I clearly see thy justice stern and love
To living kind as deep as is a mother's.
Forgive my sins, O Lord, and counting me
A mere ape, take not to heart the words
With which I thee reproached. O giver of good,
Who art the medicine rare that cures the ills
Of birth and death! Thou hast thy arrow aimed
Against my chest, and at the point of death
Has given me *jnan*. Thou art the One Supreme,
Thou art Three in One, thou art the All:
What else there is, e'en art thou! Both Sin
Thou art and Dharm, and foe thou art, and friend!
Is there a Dharma other than thy dart
Which has destroyed the blessings given by Shiv
And other gods, and pierced from front to back
My powerful chest? Great Shiva blesses all
By power acquired by only saying thy name.
Now what is hard for me to get, when I
Behold thy holy self in flesh and blood?
Sages have said that thou art everything

[1] The reader will remember Rama's sentiments as regards suppliants expressed in his speech in the Vanara council when Vibhishana came to seek refuge. Lakshmana's idea is that if Vali should have fallen at Rama's feet he would have been in a dilemma—whether to kill Vali and make good his solemn oath to Sugriva or to save Vali and falsify it.

[2] IV v 117.

And all, and Time, and fruit that Time evolves:
The world's the flower, and thou the scent thereof.
Can heaven escape me now that I have seen
Thyself with fleshly eyes? Thee I have seen
Who art but Dharma in human shape: what more
Is there for me to see? And all the sins
That I have done from ancient days up to
This moment—all are burnt away today!
Is there a better good that brother can
To brother do? Sugriv has brought thee here
To kill me with thy dart, which straight does take
Me to the realms of heaven, leaving him
The tasteless, empty crown of an earthly realm.

'Permit me now, O Ram, to make to thee
A dying prayer: if he, my brother, errs,
His mind confused by drink, aim not at him,
I pray with joined hands, the death that's named
Thy dart that thou hast aimed at me. And see
That thy own brothers point not the finger of scorn
Against Sugriv for having brought about
My death: for thou hadst thyself sworn to right
His wrongs; and how could he be charged for deeds
That flow therefrom as effects from their cause?

'For other things, O victor, though unblessed,
That fortune might yet have been mine to place
Before thee Ravan tied unto my tail,
And show thee all my little monkey tricks.
Alas, e'en this has been denied to me.
But what avails it now to think of all
That might have been? Let's think alone of that
Which might yet be: if thou desire the king
Of Lanka to be brought to thee o'er here
In chains tied hand and foot, or anything
Impossible for others to attempt,
Behold this Hanuman, he will fulfil
Thy every hest. Look on this hero, Lord,
As a bow ready bent in thy own hand.
Look on my brother as thine; nowhere canst find
Allies like unto these. Pursue, therefore,
O Ram, thy search for Sita fair, thy queen.'[1]

1 IV v 119-130.

He ceased; and then calling Sugriva to his side he advised him thus:

> 'Remember, and doubt not, Sugriva, that the Supreme One declared by the Vedas, Rishis, Brahma himself and the *Shastras*, has incarnated Itself and walks the earth as Rama in order to re-establish Righteousness here below. It is on his name that those meditate who desire lasting good. If proof thou wantest, is not the fact that he has been able to wound me mortally itself sufficient proof? When even those who die by his dart attain the highest heaven, though they might have been committing all the deadly sins, and all the days of their lives, how can we measure the good that will be the portion of those who serve him with love? . . . Yield not to the temptations natural to our kind, but remember with gratitude the help that he has given thee, and help him in thy turn even to the extent of thy life. Obey his every command implicitly, and attain Eternal Life. Forget not thyself in the pleasures of thy palace, but remember that kings are like fire: think not they would forgive one when one sins against them.'[1]

After thus admonishing Sugriva, Vali turned to Rama and said,

> 'O son of the king of kings, I here consign
> To thy protection and paternal care
> Sugriva here and all his kin!'

Angada, the son of Vali, then came from his hill sent for by Sugriva at Vali's request. When he saw his father lying in the sea of his own blood, he fell on his body, 'even as a star of tiny magnitude falling upon the full-orbed moon,' and lamented loud. But Vali embraced and consoled him saying,

> 'It is for my own good, child, that Rama has done this to me. Birth and death come inevitable to all who live in the three worlds. It is because I have earned great merit by my austerities that this end has come to me, and Rama who stands as the Eternal Witness in the hearts of all has come to me in person and given me salvation. Now give up thy childhood thoughts, my boy, and if thou wouldst learn, behold, the One Truth than which no higher does

[1] IV v 132-134, 136, 137.

exist has come down to earth in flesh and blood for our eyes to see, and stands before us, Its feet touching the ground. Worship thou therefore Him, my child, as the medicine to the Illusion-bred disease of birth! Think not ever that He has wrought my death, but work for thy salvation by serving Him, and if he has wars to wage, aid him with all thy might and fight his battles for him.'[1]

He finished, and embracing him once again, he addressed Rama and said,

'Behold this only child of mine, O Lord!
He loveth Dharm, but is a consuming fire
To the stubble called the black-skinned Rakshas race.
I leave him to thy tender care, O Ram!'[2]

Angada then fell at Rama's feet, and Rama as a token of his accepting the pledge handed to him his sword. Seeing that, the seven worlds shouted for joy.

Vali was now perfectly happy. He saw his boy accepted by Rama, and himself, as having fallen by Rama's hand, was sure of salvation. He had therefore nothing more to desire or say. And so, even with the sight of Rama blessing Angada, his soul passed away in peace.

Vali is a grand creation of Valmiki. His strength and stature, valour and self-confidence, love and hate, and last great repentance, have been drawn by Valmiki in firm outline. His reproof of Rama is scathing and true to life. But Rama being nothing more than a great king to Valmiki, he has not hesitated to put specious arguments and cruel and unfeeling expressions in the mouth of Rama when replying to the invectives of Vali. Bhaskara, the Telugu poet, has closely followed Valmiki in the relation of the incidents as well as in the speeches of Vali and Rama. As this is one of the finest of *ghattas*[3] in both Valmiki and Kamban, each poet endeavouring to give the reader the best that he is capable of, we extract in Appendix II[4] the vital

1 IV v 146-149. 2 IV v 151.

3 Episodes.

4 Aiyar had not provided the extracts, or at least the manuscripts which have come to us do not contain them. We have done our best in the circumstances and have provided in the Appendix as copious extracts as may be necessary. Aiyar appears to have contemplated a comparison between Kamban and Tulsidas as well, for we find in his rough manuscripts translations of extracts from Tulsidas's *Ramayana*

portions of this episode in Valmiki's *Ramayana,* so that the reader might see for himself in detail what Kamban takes from his original, and what he makes of it. We shall, therefore, content ourselves here with pointing out and comparing only the salient features of the episodes in the two authors.

In the first place Valmiki has made a comparatively long time to elapse between the first and second engagements of the brothers. In Valmiki, after the first engagement, Sugriva flies far into the hill of refuge, whither Rama and others follow him. This compels Valmiki to put piteous words in the mouth of Sugriva from the effect of which even the genius of Kamban has not been able to rescue his character. Griffith thus translates Sugriva's condition and words as given by Valmiki:

Then, for intolerable shame,
Not daring yet to lift his eyes,
Sugriva spoke with burning sighs:
'Thy matchless strength I first beheld,
And dared my foe, by thee impelled:
Why hast thou tried me with deceit
And urged me to a sure defeat?
Thou shouldst have said, 'I will not slay
Thy foeman in the coming fray.'
For had I then thy purpose known
I had not waged the fight alone.'
The Vanar sovereign lofty-souled,
In plaintive voice his sorrows told . . . .

The reader will remember Kamban's description of Sugriva's defeat after showing equal valour and almost equal strength. Contriving the situation in the fashion that he has

under the heading 'Appendix'. But as Aiyar had not in his final manuscripts made any reference to Tulsidas anent this episode we refrain from publishing that Appendix.

The appendix begins:

"This episode of Vali has not been well handled by Tulsidas. The reader has seen how much poetry Valmiki has introduced into this episode and how much of heroism and pathos and other *rasas* Kamban has embellished it with. By the side of these, Tulsidas's *Vali vadha upakhyana* looks callow indeed. We shall give hereunder the vital portions of it in order to satisfy the curiosity of the reader:"

After comparing extensively with the supreme Valmiki it appears pointless to compare again with Tulsidas, which may be why Aiyar finally discarded the appendix. (P)

done, he has avoided the necessity of putting any words, which must necessarily be weak and feeble, in the mouth of the future king of the Vanaras. It is Rama, in his story, that explains to him on seeing him in his exhausted condition, why he did not aim his arrow against Vali. So also in the second fight after the interval, Sugriva in Kamban only looks in the direction where Rama was standing.

When Sugriva challenges Vali for the fight, and Tara tries to dissuade Vali from accepting the challenge, Valmiki makes Vali hear her words to the very end. And he dismisses her reference to Rama only with these words:

> *'Nor, O my love, be thou dismayed*
> *Though Rama lend Sugriva aid;*
> *For one so pure and duteous, one*
> *Who loves the right, all sin will shun.'*

But see how Kamban's keen sense of the dramatic makes Vali interrupt Tara as soon as she says that Sugriva has got an ally who would conquer Vali for him. And how cleverly again Kamban makes his Vali cut short her words at her mere mention of the name of Rama as the ally she spoke of in the beginning! The zealous and passionate defence of Rama by Vali to his wife at once increases Vali's moral stature and intensifies the tragedy of the situation. For while on the one hand Vali admires Rama's grandeur of soul in parting with his crown to Bharata, looks upon him as the mighty hero who requires none to help him, and enthusiastically declares him to be the very *Avatar* of Dharma and a sea of mercy, on the other hand Rama is full of rancour and hatred against Vali and stands ready ambushed to kill him by treachery.

Again, just as a great musician conscious of his powers would keep his hearers in suspense by interposing between them and the climax that they are expecting, a surprise *avritta*,[1] perfect in itself and satisfying to the ear in spite of the delay in the expected crescendo, so Kamban introduces an aside between Rama and Lakshmana before he would allow the reader to see the fight of Vali and Sugriva and hear Vali's reproof and subsequent exoneration of Rama. In that little conversation of the brothers, Kamban displays all the art and skill of the Hoysala

1 a musical paragraph.

sculptor in the carving of the tiny elephant in the Hoysalesvara temple at Halebid.[1]

The wrestling of Vali and Sugriva is more elaborately described in Kamban than in Valmiki. The reader's interest is kept keyed up to the highest pitch from beginning to end of the whole fight, and though he expects Rama to shoot Vali down, the description of the last grip of Vali makes him almost believe that soon all will be over with Sugriva. Compare Valmiki's description,

> *Then Rama saw Sugriva quail,*
> *Marked his worn strength grow weak and fail,*
> *Saw how he turned his wistful eye*
> *To every quarter of the sky.*
> *His friend's defeat he could not brook,*
> *Bent on his shaft an eager look,*
> *Then burned to slay the conquering foe,*
> *And laid his arrow on the bow. . . . . .*

with Kamban's description of the final step of the fight where he presents the reader with the picture of Vali lifting Sugriva bodily up, and poising himself to dash him upon the rock. Kamban takes care to avoid the impression of slowness in the action which the last four lines of the above quotation give.

The struggle of Vali with the arrow, in Kamban, culminating with the line 'for who can help admiring strength'[2] is one of the finest word-paintings ever painted in literature of sheer physical force and might. And note his art which by delaying the appearance of Rama sharpens the curiosity of the reader as to what Vali will say to him when he sees him, while at the same time delighting the reader to the full with his majestic, slow-moving, cinematograph-like picture of Vali's struggle with Rama's dart. This is higher art than that of Valmiki who interposes no action, let alone action that captures all the attention of the reader, between Vali's fall and Rama's appearance, and satisfies himself merely with a description of the ornaments and physical appearance of the great Vanara.

Even Rama's appearance before Vali, how finely Kamban

[1] The elephant is carved in perfect proportions, though a bean will cover the whole carving. It will be found in the southern face of the temple. Halebid is in Hassan district in Mysore State.

[2] IV v 67; *see* page 178.

stage-manages it, introducing it first with the reading of the name by Vali, and then with his soliloquy over the treachery of Rama, and lastly completing the picture by again reminding the reader of Vali's condition which was 'even as an elephant fallen into the trap-pit prepared by the hunter, with the spear still sticking in his gigantic frame.'[1] We shall also bring to the notice of the reader, another master-stroke of the poet deliberately introduced with a deep underlying purpose, but which looks as if it was merely flourished into the canvas by a lucky accident or as the result of an over-exuberant fancy. We refer to the swooning away of Sugriva at the sight of the blood flowing from Vali's wound. By this one little stroke Kamban has to a large extent redeemed the blackness of Sugriva's treachery to his brother.

For he desires that Sugriva, the sworn ally and brother and constant companion of Rama in the future, should bear as white a character as can possibly be given to him without doing violence to the main incidents of the story as given by Valmiki.

Vali's speech attacking Rama is so exhaustive in Valmiki that Kamban finds himself obliged to use most of the arguments and turns out of it. The ideas in the verses from line 14 of Vali's first speech up to line 42 alone[2] seem to be his original contributions to the arguments and attacks of Vali. But the reader will notice that while, in Valmiki, Vali's speech is rambling and lacking in order, in Kamban it is certainly more cogent, and rises in intensity gathering new force to itself as it unrolls itself until the final taunt is delivered.

But what is most worthy of remark in the colloquy in Kamban is the greater dramatic skill displayed by the poet from beginning to end, and the high moral tone that pervades the replies of Rama. In Valmiki, as we have remarked before, Rama's arguments are specious. He declares himself to be the Deputy of Bharata, and the executor of his orders. He says,

> '*We now, as Bharat had decreed,*
> . . . .
> *Toil each sinner to repress* . . . .
> *Now Bharat rules with sovereign sway,*
> *And we his royal word obey* . . . .

1 IV v 73.

2 *See* pages 179, 180—lines beginning "I fear thy mind has lost" . . . to "And kneel thee down before a puny hare".

And we, chastising those who err
His righteous doom administer . . . .
. . . . We
Obey our king and are not free.' . . . .

The second and final argument of Valmiki's Rama—that he, as a kshattriya, was quite at liberty to kill, in whatever manner he pleased, Vali—who was no more than a monkey—lacks tenderness and truth, and is unworthy of the character of Rama.

But in Kamban, the argument is based on indisputable grounds of morality. Vali in the pride of his strength and power was pursuing his innocent brother with the object of killing him and besides had deprived him of his wife. 'Therefore' says Rama, 'I shot my dart at thee. For,

It is my ever-pressing vow to help
Th' oppressed, the poor, and those forlorn.'[1]

Vali's defence of his conduct with regard to his brother's wife and Rama's reply thereto are Kamban's contributions to the story. Rama's reply is grandly conceived. In his allusion to Jatayus, the poet gives us an exquisite blend of the *Vira* and *Karuna rasas*.[2]

Vali now admits that Rama is justified in punishing him with death. But why is it that he, a warrior and lover of Dharma, did take to the cowardly expedient of ambushing him and then aiming his dart at him ? As we have remarked before, there is no real justification for it except expediency. Vali is blessed with the magic capacity of drawing to himself one half of the force and powers of any opponent that would face him, and God himself may not take away the fruits of austerities earned by any being—virtuous or vicious. And hence Rama circumvents the boon conferred upon Vali by Shiva by shooting him without coming before him. So by making Lakshmana reply to Vali's question, Kamban has saved Rama from the dilemma of either speaking an untruth or admitting a limitation to his powers.[3]

[1] IV v 102. Also *see* pages 181 and 182.
[2] The heroic and pathetic emotions.
[3] Monsieur KICHENASSAMY, writing in the *Hind* (*see* page 152), also alludes to the Vali Episode ; and we quote certain extracts below which accord surprisingly closely with Aiyar's sentiments :

"Si j'ai pu faire réaliser à mes auditeurs la conception réelle de Râma selon KambaN, je pourrai maintenant aborder avec fruit, l'une des questions

The conversation between Tara and Vali, beautiful as it is from the point of view of dramatic construction, serves a subtler purpose in the hands of Kamban. As we have already remarked above, it impresses the reader with the super-normal physical prowess of the Vanara king and the grandeur of his soul in defending a great man from the slander of his own wife. But Kamban in the same conversation and the subsequent march of the episode is also slowly preparing a justification for Rama's action. The reference by Vali to his immense prowess and magical capacity [1] mentioned by us above aims at making the reader think that perhaps even Rama could not have killed Vali if he should have faced him. And if Vali must be killed for his crimes against Sugriva, as the reader like Vali himself must agree after Rama's justification, what has Rama to do except shoot at him from behind a cover without facing him? But at the same time, see how Kamban takes care that Vali does not say that this magical power would work against Rama also. It is after his reference to his magical power that Tara mentions Rama's name, and naturally one would expect Vali to say that that magic would cover Rama's case as well. But the careful Kamban does not put these words into his mouth. For he wants to leave the capacity of Rama to fight face to face with Vali an open question,

les plus délicates du Râmâyana, le meurtre de Vâli, et confronter en toute objectivité les arguments fournis par Vâlmiki et KambaN.

Vâli qui ne s'attendait pas à cette agression reconnut là la flèche de Râma et dans l'agonie se mit à proférer de violentes injures.

....

....

Ce à quoi le Râma de Vâlmiki répond en ces termes: « *Je vous ai tué ainsi parce que vous n'avez pas respecté le Darma de vos ancêtres ; la punition que je vous ai infligée est équitable à tout point de vue ; les hommes emploient divers engins pour attraper les animaux et comme vous êtes un singe, je peux vous tuer n'importe comment.* » Or, ces arguments ne tiennent pas facilement debout d'autant plus qu'il est assez difficile de déterminer de Vâli et de Sukrîva lequel a vraiment tort. Pourrait-on vraiment soutenir que le cadet n'a point voulu usurper le trône de son frère, car, comme le fait remarquer Subramaniya Moudaliâr, il eût été plus logique de sa part de faire couronner roi le fils de Vâli plutôt que soi-même lors de la disparition de ce dernier.

Mais chez KambaN la réponse est nette : c'est Sukrîva qui d'abord implora le secours de Râma et une fois la promesse faite il s'agissait avant tout de la tenir. Or, si Râma se présentait en personne devant Vâli ce dernier pourrait à son tour se réfugier à ses pieds et Râma, de par son principe, se verrait contraint de manquer à sa promesse."

1 In Valmiki, as the reader will see in the Appendix, Vali makes no such reference to it in his speech to Tara.

being satisfied with the impression in the mind of his reader that possibly the *Vara*[1] of Vali would have enabled him to withstand the force of Rama's dart if Rama had appeared before him.

The last words of Vali in Kamban, again, convert the ordinary hero of Valmiki into a being endowed with supreme moral grandeur. In Valmiki, Vali's words on behalf of Angada and Tara crowd out his generous gift of his might-bestowing garland to Sugriva, and the reader does not get poetically impressed with Vali's grandeur of soul in bestowing the gift on his late enemy instead of on his own son. But in Kamban, every word of Vali after his acknowledgement of his sins is calculated to increase his moral stature. Vali's addresses to Sugriva and Angada and Rama are a masterly study of how the clarified soul will look upon the affairs of the world after attaining *jnana*. He not only exonerates his brother of his murder, but looks upon him as one who helped him to attain the highest salvation. He recommends him tenderly to Rama. The manly pathos of his reference to the help that he could and would have rendered to Rama had fate been kind to him is a beautiful touch of the poet. And then it is a grand stroke to make Vali recommend Hanuman to Rama. While on the one hand it raises the character of Vali in pardoning Hanuman for his disloyalty against himself,[2] on the other hand it makes us think highly of, and start with a decided partiality for the Vanara whom Vali regards as his own equal in strength and valour. This reference is a fitting introduction to Hanuman's grand exploits in the Fifth and Sixth Books of the Poem, and it is in the fitness of things that Vali is made to extol his great powers.

The reader may have noticed that Kamban's Vali does not, as Valmiki's Vali does, recommend Tara to Rama or Sugriva. He does not even see and console Tara who comes on the scene only after his death. But the ending of Vali in Kamban is so dramatic and satisfying to the poetic sense that the mind does not inquire why Kamban did not make Vali see and speak to Tara before he passed away.

[1] The blessing given by gods to beings with whose devotions and austerities they are pleased.

[2] *i.e.*, by joining Sugriva in his exile and aiding and abetting him in the bringing about of Vali's death.

CHAPTER XII

HANUMAN

Today Hanuman holds a unique place among Hindu gods and heroes. Temples dedicated to his godhead are scattered all over India. Miracles are performed in his name. Scholars meditate on his powers for years, and as a result of that meditation attain intellectual powers unimaginable by people belonging to the younger civilization of the West.[1] Ramadas, the *Guru* of Shivaji, imagined himself to be an incarnation of Hanuman and dotted the whole of Maharashtra with temples built to his divinity. The orthodox Hindu still believes that Hanuman is even today living in his own identical body, and that when this *Kalpa*[2] ends and another *Kalpa* begins, he will be appointed by the Supreme as the regent of the *Brahmaloka* and creator of the universe. We shall in this chapter study the character and exploits of this great hero of the *Ramayana* as our poet has developed them.

The most outstanding feature of Hanuman's character is his devotion to Rama. At the very first sight of Rama and Lakshmana —at the time that he comes to find out who they might be—as they were wandering on the slopes of the Rishyamuka hill, his heart melts with love for them. He feels as one who unexpectedly falls in with friends from whom he had parted long before.

> 'How even tigers and pards,' he thought within himself, 'look on them with tenderness, even as they would on their own cubs! Peacocks and other birds fly in groups and shade the delicate bodies of these strangers from the hot rays of the sun with their great wings : clouds cool them with their little rain drops, marching over them as they walk on. The burning stones on their way become soft and cool as honey-dripping flowers to their feet at every step. Even trees and plants worship them, bending down their heads when they come near. Are they Dharma's self ? Are these beings gods indeed who wipe off the sorrows of living kind and give them

1 The late Tiruppati Kavi, the great *Shatavadhani** and poet of Andhradesha, is said to have attained his phenomenal memory and poetic gifts by meditating on this great servant of Rama.

(* *Shatavadhani*—one who could concentrate his mind on a hundred topics at the same time.)

2 Age.

salvation, burning away the inevitable fruits of their deeds? My very bones melt, the flood-gates of love are opened within my heart, and I see no limit or end to the affection that surges within me towards them!'[1]

He nears Rama and Lakshmana, disguised as a Brahman youth, and impresses Rama greatly with his modest bearing and his replies to his questions. After listening to but a few words of his, Rama says to Lakshmana,

'It appears that there is no knowledge, brother, that this young man has not acquired. He looks a very ocean of Vedic lore. Who can he be, this childe of the eloquent tongue? May he be Brahma or may he be Shiva?'[2]

As he took leave of Rama after this short interview, promising to bring Sugriva to him, Hanuman fell at his feet. Rama protested that being a Brahman he should not have fallen down at his feet. But Hanuman, 'who was born to save Dharma from her loneliness,' told him that he was only a Vanara; and intending to show Rama his capacity to serve him, he stood assuming his own proper shape. Even the Meru mountain appeared too small to be compared to his high and mighty shoulders. Seeing his vast size and superhuman strength, Rama spoke to his brother these words about Hanuman:

'Even that perfection which cannot be expressed by the Vedas, or even perceived by the uncorrupted *jnana*, has descended to this earth, brother, taking the shape of a Vanara. We have won this grand hero for a friend, and the omens are good: vanished now are all our sufferings, and days of happiness are dawning for us. And think of the greatness of the king of the Vanaras who has such a hero to obey his every hest.'[3]

As Hanuman is on his way to Sugriva after seeing them, his mind is incessantly dwelling on their noble features and nobler virtues. And when he sees his master, he cannot contain himself, but says to him,

'O sire, We are blessed indeed, beyond measure, both myself and thy race! For the Yama is come who has the force to destroy Vali: we have crossed the sea of misery!'[4]

and he dances for joy, 'even like the God who drank the poison[5] to save mankind.'

[1] IV ii 12-15. [2] IV ii 20. [3] IV ii 36, 37.
[4] IV ii 40. [5] Shiva.

With every minute, however, his love and admiration for Rama go on differentiating themselves from his love and admiration for Lakshmana, and he adds to the former another emotion, namely that of *Bhakti.* [1] His attraction to Rama finally becomes as inevitable as the attraction of iron to the magnet. His whole heart fills itself quickly with the image of Rama to the exclusion of almost any other. He can never from now on speak of Rama in the language of moderation. For he has come to believe Rama to be greater than the Trinity—he believes him to be the Ultimate Brahman Itself. So in the course of the same account to Sugriva of his meeting with the Men, he says,

> 'Rama is Vishnu himself worshipped by the Devas: for what man could have killed Maricha who came disguised as a magic deer?' [2]

Hanuman's belief in the divinity of Rama was further confirmed by the incident of Sampati which we shall relate here. After the death of Vali and the ending of the rainy season, Sugriva assembled his Vanara forces and sent them all over the earth to search for Sita. Hanuman marched south under the command of Angada, the son of Vali. After a great many adventures his party reached the promontory of Mahendra abutting itself into the channel between India and Lanka. Sita had not been discovered so far, and now the ocean barred their further advance. The time of one month fixed by Sugriva for them to return with their task accomplished was fast drawing to a close, and they were filled with despair and sorrow at not having discovered her. While they stood on the hill discussing whether they should take their lives there on account of their failure or should return to Kishkindha and report their ill-success to their king, Hanuman said, 'we must rather pursue our search and fall like Jatayus who gave up his life in defence of Sita!' Sampati, who was a brother of Jatayus, was living on that hill with his wings burnt out, in the hope that somebody might come there and repeat the name of Rama, when alone, the Sun-God had told him, his wings would grow again for flight. When he heard Hanuman speak of Jatayus as dead, he walked to where the Vanaras were holding their council and full of grief asked them how Jatayus had died. When Hanuman told him that he had died by the sword of Ravana, the great vulture king wept pathetically and asked him why they had fought with each other. But when Hanuman replied that he

1 Devotion.

2 IV ii 49.

fell while trying to rescue Sita while she was being carried off by Ravana, the grief of Sampati was turned to joy, and he exclaimed,

> 'Thrice blessed is my brother, O son of Truth,
> Who gave his life in cause of holy Ram!
> If in defence of Rama's spouse my brother
> Was killed, how can we say, he died? He has
> Attained immortal fame, and life that knows
> No death. When he did earn the love of Ram,
> Who's great as Righteousness itself, he earned
> A glory that does rarely come to men,
> Or gods. What matters now if he is dead?
> What joy is greater than what is now his?'[1]

He then desired the Vanara heroes to repeat in chorus with devotion the name of Rama. They repeated; when lo, his wings grew to their original size and strength. He told them the Daedalus-Icarus-like story of himself and his brother, how in the pride of their youth and strength they rose sheer into the sky to explore the *Svarga,* how the Sun-God grew wroth at their presumption and concentrated his rays upon them, how in order to save his younger brother Jatayus he, Sampati, flew over and protected him from the burning rays while his own wings were being singed and burnt, and how the Sun-God at length took pity on him and blessed him saying that his wings would grow when the Vanaras, who would in due course of ages come in search of Sita, would repeat the holy name of Rama in his hearing. After thus detailing to them the story of himself and Jatayus, Sampati told them that he had actually seen Ravana carrying away Sita in his chariot, and that she was at the moment actually in Lanka beyond the sea. He then spoke to them of the dangers of the deep and the prowess of Ravana, and suggested to them that one of them might try, if possible, to cross over to Lanka and ascertain everything; and if that should not be possible they should return to give the information to Rama. So saying, he spread his wings for flight and flew away to assume the guardianship of the Vultures now left without a king by the death of Jatayus.

When Hanuman saw the Vulture's wings, singed ages before, grow by the mere hearing of Rama's name, Hanuman's belief in Rama's divinity increased a hundredfold, and required only the

[1] IV xiii 43-45.

sight of Sita at her bowery prison to become absolute. So much so that when after seeing Sita, and after destroying the Rakshasas whom he had provoked, he was captured by Indrajit and was brought before Ravana, and Ravana asked him,

'Art thou Narayana, or wielder fierce
Of the thunderbolt,[1] or he of the triple lance ?[2]
Or Brahma ? Or the cobra bearing high[3]
The earth ? . . . .
Thou must be one of them in disguise come !'[4]

Hanuman replied without hesitating :

'I'm none of those that thou hast named e'en now :
Nor do I serve such puny beings as these.
Know me as messenger of Him whose eyes
Are even as the blood-red lotus, who
Stands pledged to save from bonds of ill and good
Rishis and Gods, and e'en the Three Supreme . . .
He is the God Supreme, th' embodiment
Of Dharm Itself, whose nature absolute
Even the Vedas have not power to sound ;
Who in the hoary ages past came down
To save the elephant who called aloud
'O Lord Supreme, I trust myself to thee !'
Know that the Ultimate Cause that has no first
Or last or middle, or time or measure that bounds,
Has thrown away the lance and disk and pot
And armed Itself with bow and murd'rous dart,
And leaving sea and flower, and Silver Hill
Has come to show itself in fair Ayodh.'[5]

What wonder is there that, believing as he does Rama to be the Supreme God, Hanuman should love and serve him as a devoted servant ? From the moment that he has decided for himself that Rama is God, Hanuman lives for him and him alone. He has no other interest in the world except the service of Rama. Rama's friends and relations are his own friends and relations, and Rama's enemies are his own foes.

And when Rama blessed him with his love and affection, and

[1] Indra. [2] Shiva. [3] Adishesh.
[4] V xiii 70. [5] V xiii 74, 75, 79, 80.

made it known to him, among other ways, by taking him apart (when the Vanaras were being commissioned to go in different directions in search of Sita) and entrusting to him his most intimate message to Sita, Hanuman's enthusiasm for Rama's service knew no bounds. So, as the reader will remember, he joyfully accompanied Angada to the Southern Ocean.

The Vanaras were glad that they had obtained some reliable information from Sampati about the whereabouts of Sita. But who could cross the sea and enter Lanka ? Nila and other leaders said that they had not the strength to attempt the feat. Angada said that he could by a supreme effort cross over to Lanka, but that he could not after that trust himself to recross the ocean back to the mainland. Jambhavan the Nestor of the *Ramayana* both in years and wisdom, excused himself saying that his feet had become too delicate for such superhuman efforts ever since they stumbled against the Meru mountain, the while he walked round the earth announcing by beat of drum the glories of the Lord on the day, ages before, that He measured the earth and heaven as Trivikrama. But he addressed Hanuman and reminded him thus of his prowess and his great qualities :

'O thou whose days will longer last than life
Of Brahm himself ! Thou art a scholar subtle
And wise, of unsurpassed eloquence.
The very God of Death doth tremble when
Thy wrath is roused : such is thy strength renowned !
Nor fire, nor air, nor water can destroy,
Nor weapons scathe thy mighty frame. And who
Is there we can compare to thee ? For thou
Alone can rival thyself. If thou spring
From here, thou canst with ease alight upon
The outer universe . . . .
Thou canst expand and equal Meru mount
In size : if thou desire, thou canst enter
Within the space minute that doth divide
One line of falling rain from its fellow . . . .
Even if all the worlds do stand opposed
Thou canst withstand their might, unknowing fear . . .
Thou stand'st firm-based on justice, chastity,
And truth—thy heart unagitated stands
For ever free from thoughts of sex . . . . .

So cross the sea (thou hast the proper strength

And force t' achieve that dreaded task), and give
Us back our lives, and earn for thyself fame,
And for thy king the joy of pleasing Ram!'[1]

Here, in the words of Jambhavan, we have all the noble traits of the Vanara enumerated by the poet. Hanuman's might and physical prowess are unequalled. The reader will call to mind his fights with Indrajit and Kumbhakarna which we have described in the chapters dealing with these Rakshasas and their battles. He will not also have forgotten how Hanuman flies over to Mount Meru from Lanka in order to bring the Sanjivi plant, and how he plucks the hill itself by the roots and carries it in his hand. The Hindu wrestler and gymnast even today meditates on him and his prowess, and sings his praises before he begins his daily exercises. Hanuman, again, is the eternal bachelor, preserving the strength of his body and the purity of his heart and chastity of mind for noble achievements and fame, and the service of his divine master.

Hanuman did not speak about his prowess—he was, as it were, unconscious of it—till Jambhavan suggested to him that he was the only fit person to cross to Lanka and return with news of Sita. But when he heard the words of Jambhavan, already filled as he was with his unbounded enthusiasm for the service of Rama, he became conscious of his powers and thus proclaimed his determination and his confidence :

'Do you command me to uproot the isle
Of Lanka yonder, and place it 'fore you here?
Do you command me to destroy the brood
Of sinful Rakshasas and fly to Ram
With Sita freed? Behold I will obey
Your every hest. I'll cross the ocean stream
Of a hundred *yojans*[2] with a single step,
Ev'n as the Lord Trivikram strode the worlds!
And I will tame the wicked Rakshasas
Though gods should fight upon their side. Each one
Of you has got the force, within a trice
To leap the oceans seven, subdue the worlds,
And Sita lead to Ram, where'er she is
Kept imprisoned. So who is blessed like me

1 IV xvi 9-12, 14, 15, 19.

2 One yojan = 36 miles 3 furlongs.

Who am commissioned by such worthy heroes
To do this task and show my skill to them.
Ev'n if the ocean burst its bounds and stride
Along with terrific roar t' engulf the worlds,
E'en then, your blessings and my Ram's commands
Would lift me up as wings on either flank,
And I could fly across like Garud great!
So give me leave, O friends, and wait for me
Upon this hill till I return, my task
In yonder isle fulfilled.' [1]

In Valmiki also Hanuman speaks of his own prowess after Jambhavan's encomium of himself. Griffith translates his speech thus :

' The Wing-God, Fire's eternal friend,
Whose blasts the mountain summits rend,
With boundless force that none may stay,
Takes where he lists his viewless way.
Sprung from that glorious father, I
In power and speed with him may vie,
A thousand times with airy leap
Can circle loftiest Meru's steep :
With my fierce arms can stir the sea,
Till from their beds the waters flee
And rush at my command to drown
This land with grove and tower and town.
I through the fields of air can spring
Far swifter than the feathered King,
And leap before him as he flies
On sounding pinions through the skies.
I can pursue the Lord of Light
Uprising from the eastern height,
And reach him ere his course be sped
With burning beams engarlanded.
I will dry up the mighty main,
Shatter the rocks and rend the plain.
O'er earth and ocean will I bound ;
And every flower that grows on ground,
And bloom of climbing plants shall show

[1] IV xiv 21-25.

Strewn on the ground, the way I go,
Bright as the lustrous path that lies
Athwart the region of the skies.
The Maithil lady will I find—
Thus speaks mine own prophetic mind—
And cast in hideous ruin down
The shattered walls of Lanka town.'

Compare this speech with the words that Kamban has put in the mouth of Hanuman. Just one or two strokes of the brush, a softening of the colour here, a slight change of the colour there and behold Hanuman is changed in the hands of Kamban from a boasting Vanara into a hero, conscious of his strength of course, but free from the spirit of bravado.

As Hanuman's search for Sita and his adventures in Lanka during and after the search show some of the best traits of his character, and are also the best and oftenest remembered of his exploits, we shall give Kamban's description of the same in some detail.

After taking leave of his companions, Hanuman climbed up to the highest peak of the Mahendra promontory, and stood like a pillar supporting the vault of the sky. Then poising himself for flight, with hands and tail outstretched in air, his neck drawn in, his legs bent, and his chest contracted, he pressed down his feet and rose sheer into the sky and clove through the air towards Lanka. After sundry adventures during the course of his flight, he sprang on the further shore and began to reconnoitre the environs of the capital.[1]

There, in Lanka, he saw every magnificence that could be imagined by man or god. The sky-reaching turrets of its very private houses, the height of its fort walls, the depth of its moat, its gold-plated chariots, and bejewelled elephants, its high-bred horses and proud warriors, its lancers and bow-men and knights of heavy armour, impressed Hanuman with the strength and power and prosperity of the Rakshasas. He saw the wondrous trees of heaven growing in the pleasure parks of the Rakshasas and the river of *Svarga* flowing by their house-gardens. He saw the court-beauties of Indra's Amaravati[2] serving as handmaids to the

1 Kamban's description of the flight of Hanuman across the sea is full of fancy, and lacks the grand simplicity and naturalness of Valmiki's description of the same. But still it is rich with fine similes and is done in *le grand* style.

2 Capital of Indra's celestial empire.

Rakshasis, and gods waiting upon the Rakshasas. And he saw the dancing and the singing, the playing and the sporting of Rakshasa beauties and *Devadasis*[1] to the delight of the Rakshasas in their homes and public halls. Seeing the magnificence of the mere outer city Hanuman exclaimed to himself:

> 'If archers here are strong, the dancers seem
> More dangerous; the pugilists surpass
> Them both, while swordsmen seem invincible.
> And when I see my Ram, what shall I say
> Of Karpanas and Dands and Bhindipals[2]?'[3]

His capacity to assume whatever shape he pleased stood Hanuman in good stead here. He contracted himself in size and approached the gateway of the fort. The sun had set, and Rakshasas were mounting guard armed with spear and lance, axe and pestle and bow, *karpana* and *musundi*, steel discus and clubs, slings and noose and other weapons.

> 'Where are the gods,' he said, 'or Asuras
> Who have the strength to force these gates? If such
> Should be our foes, and such their grand defence,
> Can we for vict'ry hope when war begins?
> It is not hard to cross the roaring sea:
> But sea of Rakshas arms to cross is not,
> I fear an easy task. If I relax
> Ever so little my wariness, I can't
> Return with task accomplished to my lord.
> And it will be a terrific war, when war
> Breaks out.'[4]

Avoiding the gateway, Hanuman jumped over the battlements and entered the city. Here he had need of all his coolness and resolution and strength, for the Argus-eyed Guardian-Spirit of Lanka, unconquered ever since the foundation of the state, opposed his further march, and advanced against him with fierce mien. Seeing however that he was a Vanara, she called out to him to 'leap back and fly from here'. But cogitating within himself whether it would be proper to kill a being which appeared to be female, he said to her,

[1] Celestial maidens.
[2] Most probably battering rams and other artillery of ancient and medieval times.
[3] V ii 41.
[4] V ii 72, 73.

'What harm is there if I just look round the city and satisfy my curiosity? Thou seest I am but a poor monkey.'[1]

The spirit grew enraged at his want of prompt obedience and addressed him thus:

'Say who art thou that dar'st to slight my word?
Even he who burned the flying towns of yore[2]
Would fear to tempt my anger thus. Think'st thou
That Lanka is a place for curious mites
To peep into an' explore?' So spoke the form
And laughed. Han'man echoed the laugh, and fanned
Her anger more. 'Who then art thou?' she roared;
'And say, for whom dost spy? Thou wouldst not stir,
It seems, till all thy life is shaken out
Of thee.' Great Han'man smiled and quietly said,
'I go not hence before I take a round
In Lanka fort.'[3]

Seeing his nonchalance the spirit ransacked her brains to guess who he might be. She thought within herself,

He comes not on an honest errand. Sure
A Vanar he is not: Even God of Death
Would sink to earth when he encounters me.
Who can he be? He smiles as He who drank
The ocean poison—Three-eyed Mahadev![4]

And fearing danger for Lanka if he were not ended, she aimed at him her three-pointed lance, which came on him like a thunderbolt. But he caught it adroitly with his teeth as if in sport, and broke it into two as Garuda would break a cobra in mid-air. The Spirit was taken aback at seeing his force and skill, and then recovering herself rushed at him with other divine weapons. But Hanuman closed with her and wrested all of them from out of her hands before she could hurl them. So she struck him with her fists with such force that sparks of fire flew about at the stroke. Hanuman desired merely to punish her, while sparing her life as she bore a woman's form, and so he struck at her with but half his force. But she fell down vomiting blood.

[1] V ii 83.
[2] Shiva.
[3] V ii 85.
[4] V ii 86.

And then, behold, from the prostrate form arose a Spirit divine and fell at Hanuman's feet. She told him that she was an inmate of *Svarga,* who had been cursed by Brahma for misbehaviour and sent down to earth to guard the city and site of Lanka, and that Brahma had promised to her at the moment of cursing her that the day that a monkey should knock her down here the curse would expire. And,

> 'What was foretold in ages past,' she said,
> 'Has come to be, for Virtue does triumph
> And sin does fail, when all is said and done.
> Enter therefore and do thy work: thou canst
> Achieve thy wish—what canst thou not achieve?'[1]

So saying she rose into the sky and sought her home in *Svarga,* while Hanuman entered the city without further trouble 'even like a drop of acid for the milk of Rakshas power'.

And what luxury did he not see in that island city which was adorned with the plunder of a hundred realms? The gems inlaid on the turrets of the palaces converted night into very day. The Rakshasis could see their faces mirrored upon the crystal walls and the golden pavements of their palatial homes. The flooring of the stages in their theatres was made of burnished gold. It was the Deva damsels that danced and acted for the Rakshasas' pleasure. Rakshasis moved from place to place in *vimanas* canopied over with pearls. The daughters of *Svarga* sang for the Rakshasis, played on their divine instruments and delighted the Rakshasa couples with their soul-capturing music. Some Rakshasas and their wives were revelling in the luxuries of wine and love and delicate sensual delights. Even Devas and *Rishis* were singing the praises of the Rakshasas and blessing them—such was their fear for the name of Rakshasa.

Hanuman went on searching everywhere for Sita, entering through chinks and key-holes and windows and taking every shape convenient for the time being. After long searching without encountering any notability, he entered a huge hall adorned with the trophies taken from the realms of Indra—Indra's own lustrous-jewelled crown, inlaid in the vast canopy, scattering the darkness of the night to the very ends of the earth. He saw the gigantic

[1] V ii 95.

form of a Rakshasa sleeping there like Adishesh[1] or like a veritable heaving ocean.

The form was dark even as if all the darkness of the world had been concentrated in one place, and as if all that there is of sin in the universe had taken fleshly shape. The *Devadasis*—maids of heaven—were pressing his feet. His breathing was like the whirlwind awaiting the Day of Dissolution to blow everything into atoms. And he looked in his sleep like a huge cobra mesmerized by the wizard's spell, or like the ocean reserving its all-destroying force for the Day of Final Dissolution. It was only from the single head of the Rakshasa that Hanuman corrected his first impression that he might be Ravana himself, and inferred that he might be his famous brother Kumbhakarna ; and so he subdued his rising wrath and passed on.

After entering and searching several other palaces, he saw Vibhishana sleeping on his bed in his home. He saw his noble face, and thought that Dharma itself had taken shape and was living in a Rakshasa body in order to escape detection and destruction at the hands of the wicked Rakshasas of Lanka. He did not see Sita there and passed on. After some more searchings he came before the citadel within which Indra had been kept imprisoned. He entered and saw Rakshasas with fierce weapons and fiercer aspect guarding the gates and courts. He who could by his magic pass through even chinks which smoke cannot enter, went in and saw Indrajit reposing in sleep like a lion. Seeing the heroism and valour shining in his manly face, he thought within himself,

'Is he the Rakshas king or Kartikey,[2]
The son of Mahadeva, God of gods ?
He looks a lion sleeping in his den.
A terrific fight I see in the days to come
When Lakshmana and Ram encounter him.
With such a hero to conduct his wars,
Where is the wonder that Visrava's son[3]
Is master of the universe ? Except
Vishnu or Brahm or Shiv, can any face
This Rakshasa upon the field ?'[4]

1 The huge thousand-hooded divine cobra bearing the earth on its heads.

2 Son of Shiva, so called because six heavenly maidens from the constellation *Kartik* (Pleiades) were his nursemaids.

3 Ravana.

4 V ii 141, 142.

So saying he passed, and crossing another moat he was before another citadel. He jumped over its walls, and there, behold, a more magnificent sight than had hitherto attracted his eyes unrolled itself before his vision. Every building was like a palace of Wonderland. Diamonds and emeralds, sapphires and rubies, moonstones and cat's-eyes, made the night shine with tenfold more brilliance than day. Women of perfect beauty were in all stages and postures of sleep and repose, and dalliance and sport. Many were pining for the love of Ravana who had forgotten all his dames after he had conceived his passion for Sita. *Vina* [1] and *mridanga*[2], and the sweet voices of the beauties of heaven entranced some, inflamed the passions in the hearts of others, and saddened yet others by calling up memories of their absent lovers. There were dicers playing on golden boards, betting garlands of pearls and the crown jewels of conquered kings. There were Rakshasa beauties dancing and singing sensual songs forgetting sleep.

But in none of these palaces did he find the object of his search. At length he entered the superb palace which belonged to Mandodari, the wife of Ravana. There she lay a queen among beauties, her feet pressed by Menaka and Rambha, Tillottama and Urvasi,[3] the deer-tail fans softly waving over her reposing form, the god of soft breezes himself regulating to a nicety the amount of cool air that must be allowed to touch her delicate body. Seeing her glorious form, unequalled by any that he had anywhere seen, throwing into the shade by the brilliance of its beauty even the dazzling gems that adorned her apartments,

> There crossed a thought in Han'man's mind that she
> Might be his Rama's spouse. The thought consumed
> Like flaming fire his limbs and heart and soul,
> And thus he spoke within himself: 'Ah me,
> In vain has been my huge gigantic size
> And more than mortal power. But die that thought!
> If she who sleeps o'er there should hap to be
> Sita—her virtue trodden underfoot
> And bond of love and chastity undone—
> With this day ends th' unsullied honour of Ram.

[1] The most melodious of Indian musical instruments. It has four or seven strings and countless stops.

[2] The soft-sounding drum.

[3] Famed beauties and danseuses of the court of Indra, the king of the Devas.

But shall it end alone? No, no! with it
Shall end this town with all her Rakshasas,
And after I have killed them all, I will
My own accursed life straightway destroy!'[1]

So saying he looked at her once again, and seeing that her lineaments were not human he said to himself,

'She looks not human, but seems a Danava[2]
Or Yaksha[3] dame. Ah woe is me that I
Could entertain this sinful thought! For can
A woman who has looked on Ram as Lord
E'er cast her eyes upon another being
Though he were Manmatha himself?'[4]

And now taking a nearer view of the *Asuri*, the great Vanara, who was an expert also in the science of face-reading, concluded thus:

'Though on her person are not wanting signs
Of luck, I find her days of prosperity
Are o'er. She looks as if she is alarmed
In dream: she stutters forth some words in fear:
This doth forebode her widowhood; and ruin,
I see, doth hang o'er this extensive fort.'[5]

So saying he left the abode of Mandodari and entered the magnificent palace of Ravana. As he entered, the earth trembled, the right eyes and brows and limbs of the Rakshasis sleeping or serving therein quivered; a shudder passed through the firmament to the farthest bounds of the earth; the clouds thundered without lightning; and the pots containing sacrificial water burst. Hanuman's prophetic eyes saw the impending fate of all this splendour, and

His heart was moved, and he exclaimed, 'Alas,
A few days more, and there'll be nothing left
Of all this matchless splendour! For be he
Who he may, every one must reap or good
Or ill, as he has sown! And who can 'scape
The rigour of this law?'[6]

[1] V ii 199, 200. [2] & [3] Clans of Asuras.
[4] V ii 201. [5] V ii 202. [6] V ii 205.

Inside the palace he saw Ravana sleeping on a faultlessly white silver bed of vast expanse. With his huge body of many heads and hands he looked like a black ocean scattering gems and gold, with its innumerable waves reposing on another sea, the Sea of Milk ; or like the great Man-Lion with his innumerable heads and hands and sun-bright crowns reposing in the cave of the golden Meru after destroying Hiranyakashipu. Though a thousand maids of heaven were waving their golden-handled fans of deer-tail, and the coolest of cool breezes was playing over him, the thought of Sita disturbing his heart even in sleep was wearing his life away inch by inch. The breeze that was waving over the sandal paste on his body, instead of cooling him, served only to fan the flame of his passion. His very soul having fled to where Sita was kept imprisoned, his dark and empty heart was even like an earth-hole which its cobra inmate had abandoned. His bed of silver was white-hot, and the flowers over his person burned to ashes even with the bees inside them—such was the burning heat of the passion in his heart.

A brilliant smile was now stealing over Ravana's face as he was dreaming that Sita had entered his chamber. When Hanuman saw the Rakshasa thus reposing without repose, his heart was agitated with a volcanic rage, eyes shot fire, and heaven and earth split to pieces at his frown. And he cogitated within himself :

'Of what avail is all my strength, and what
Will people say of me, if the jewelled crowns
Of him who stole the lovely spouse of Ram
I kick not down, nor break his serried heads ?
And what will be my service worth if, him
Encountered, I my valour fail to show ?
My service should be real—not vain pretence.
Shall he with life escape e'en when I've seen
Him here ? Let me but kick his crowned heads
And break his branching arms, and end this town ;
I care not, what befalleth me thereafter !'[1]

So saying he ground his teeth and clenched his fists for action. But immediately he began to reason within himself whether this was the right thing to do ; and after considering more coolly, he

[1] V ii 219, 220.

decided that it was not proper for him to use force at that moment. He said to himself:

> 'I have not executed yet my lord's
> Commands: it is not wise to turn aside
> From present work unfinished and to run
> After enterprises new and strange. And now,
> To think of it, if I had acted rash
> On th' impulse, grievous would have been the fault!'[1]

Kamban moralises in a grand stanza on the self-control of Hanuman. He says,

> 'Though mighty as the Shulin[2] who could drink
> The boiling ocean poison at a draught,
> Will ev'r the wise launch on an enterprise
> Difficult without deliberation due?
> Hanuman stayed his hand, e'en as the deep,
> Which, though it can o'erwhelm the earth, yet bides
> Its time and keeps itself within its bounds.'[3]

A deeper reason also prevented Hanuman from then and there waking Ravana and fighting him. He thought,

> Let me restrain this rage, for overshadowed
> Will be the fame of Ram, if a Vanar low
> Should end the wicked one who stole his spouse
> And keeps her in captivity.[4]

Ravana's features and condition relieved him completely with respect to one matter. The reader will remember the suspicion that rose in his mind when he saw Mandodari. Now that he had seen Ravana exhibiting all the signs of unrequited passion, the burden was lifted from off his heart completely, and he carried himself out from the presence of Ravana on the wings of the happy thought that Sita was safe from his sacrilegious touch.

But as he came out of Ravana's palace he saw that all likely and unlikely places in Lanka had been searched by him and yet

1 V ii 221.
2 He of the three pronged lance—Shiva.
3 V ii 222.
4 V ii 223.

he had not seen Sita. So he fell into a despairing mood and soliloquised thus :

'Alas, that jewelled one is not in this
Extensive fort. Has he, perchance, killed her
Because she would not yield her charms to him ?
Or has he eat her in his wicked rage ?
Or haply does he hold her captive close
In another world ? I know not what to think
Or where to search for her ? What shall I say
To Ram when I return from here ? I fear
My sorrows will not end unless with life.

'Kakutstha[1] would be thinking I would bring
A message from his Sita : while my lord
Sugriv would ev'n expect that I'd return
Accompanied by Sita freed : and this
Is what I've done : Can I at all return
To Ram, success achieved i' th' task that I
Have undertook ? Or shall I have to end
My life with those that I have left upon
The continent to wait for my return ? . . . .

'O'er all these seven hundred *yojanas*[2]
Of land, there's not a living thing that I
Have missed, and yet I have not seen the spouse
Of Rama : having crossed the ocean stream,
Am I to sink beneath this sea of grief ?
Shall I yon Ravan ply with blows, and force
Him to discover Sita ? Or shall I
Burn down this city with its wicked king ?
I may the Devas ask : but how can they
Reply, when they with terror die at sight
Of Rakshas arms ? Who else will me direct ? . . .

'Sampati, king of Vultures said he saw
That lovely one in Lanka ; e'en his words
Are falsified ! Shall I not even now
Destroy myself ? But shall I die without
Even revenge ? For there is not a doubt
That Ravana did steal our Sita fair ;
I may not die therefore, before I lift
This citadel and cast it in the sea.'[3]

1 Rama. 2 36 miles 3 furlongs.
3 V ii 225-227, 229-233.

But he still walked on to see if he had by chance missed seeing any spot, and as luck would have it, he espied a grove of Ashoka trees which he had not visited so far. And determining within himself that if he should not see Sita there he would destroy Lanka, he entered it. As he entered, the gods rained showers of flowery rain over him, for Sita was placed by the Rakshasa in that lovely garden.

There in the midst of black-skinned Rakshasis,
Seated as a flash of lightning in the bosom
Of a sable cloud, he saw the sun-flower bright
That smiles alone to the light of Kaustubha—
The brilliant sun-like gem on Rama's breast.[1]

He doubted not but that she must be Sita—she was like a swan floating on the stream of tears flooding down her cheeks. He became intoxicated with joy at sight of her holy grief, and exclaimed,

'Dharma yet lives, and I will seek no more
My death! For I have searched, and lo, the Lord
Has blest these eyes with sight of Holy Sita . . . .
The wicked tyrant of the universe
Has wrought this guile for his own destined doom;
For Ram is none but Vishnu come to earth,
And Sita, Lakshmi of the lotus throne!

'She looks a gem laid o'er with dirt; she's like
The moon, her rays by sunlight dulled; her hair
Has lost its gloss. But lo, (the Lord be blest!)
Her virtue stands intact: who can set bounds
To strength that Dharma gives to mortal life?
Whom shall I praise for this grand conquest o'er
Such great temptation? Shall I praise the valour
Of Ram? Or the grandeur of her hero-soul?
The gods are free from blame, and Brahmans true,
And Dharma firm-established stands; hence, what
Is there impossible for me? And I
Have not in vain the ocean crossed for Ram.
If Sita should from highest self-control

[1] V iii 63.

Have fallen even by the breadth of an hair,
I feared Ram's wrath would clean deluge the world.
That fear now is gone, and earth is now
For ev'r immune from ill. For what are they
Who live 'mid fire or kill their appetites
Or practise other austerities besides,
When placed beside the fire of Sita's soul?
Sita, behold, has given a lustre new
To womanhood and chastity by the life
That she is leading in this Lanka proud.'[1]

The thought of Rama suddenly comes to him and he pities him for not having the good fortune to see how Sita is living in the midst of so much allurement and force and fear. He says,

'What pity, 'tis not given to Ram to see
With his own eyes this holy one, as she
Does lead her life austere in Lanka's grove!'[2]

And then he continues and concludes thus his soliloquy:

'Was it the spirit of Dharm protected her?
Or was it Jan'ka's virtuous deeds did fence
Her body 'round from touch of ill? Or does
She owe her chastity and life to her
Own steadfast soul? Can my wonder ever cease?
And who has fought temptation like to her?
And when I speak of her to comrades mine
Can ev'er I tire of praising her holy life?
And what temptation? All the dazzling splendours
Of Rakshas power were there to tempt her heart,
While Ravan's lawless might was there to force
Her body: and gods are serving him both night
And day. Who could withstand such snares? And yet
She won. Now vanished are all obstacles!
In sooth, can Sin o'er Virtue e'er prevail?'[3]

The reader will agree after reading the above that Kamban has risen to the highest ideals of loyalty to a heroic master and of love of Dharma in this soliloquy of Hanuman. How enthusiastic

[1] V iii 65, 67-71, 73. [2] V iii 73. [3] V iii 75, 76.

Hanuman becomes when he sees the perfect virtue of Sita! He cannot tire of her praises or of the enumeration of the temptations that she has overcome. A new strength has now filled his heart—the strength that comes to man when he sees a grand soul that had opportunities of falling but stands serene and triumphant—and he exclaims, 'what is there impossible for me now?'

As he was in the midst of these reflections, Ravana who had awakened from his disturbed sleep came in state to see Sita, and, in spite of the fruitlessness of his previous attempts, to again try to persuade her to accept himself as her lover.

As we propose to give large extracts from this interview in the chapters dealing with Ravana and Sita we pass it over here.

As Ravana went away spurned by Sita, he ordered the Rakshasi guards of her prison to threaten her in every manner possible and make her yield herself early. They abused her, therefore, and taunted her, and threatened her with their cruel weapons. But Trijata, the daughter of Vibhishana, checked them and consoled Sita. The Rakshasis held their tongue; and thinking that this was the proper time to make himself known to Sita, Hanuman pronounced some spells which made them go to sleep on the instant. As he was thinking, however, as to how he should approach her and what he should speak to her, the threats and taunts of the Rakshasis which had burned into her heart drove her to despair, and seeing the Rakshasis sinking to sleep Sita began to lament her fate. What with the Rakshasa's words and the threats of the Rakshasis, her despair had become so intense that she doubted the very love of her husband. Her lamentations were in this strain:

"I have been living all these days upon
The hope of seeing my Lord, and so I've been
Bearing with patience all the ills that came
On me. But, sooth, will he admit again,
One who has lived so long in this sinful land?
I see a stranger look with lust on me,
I swallow every word with which he fills
My ears, and yet I choose not death: is there
A Rakshasi more wicked than myself?
Dishonour now has lighted on my name
And can't be warded off: where is the chaste
In story or in life who has loved her life
When forced away from home by lustful men?

Is not my honour great, and modesty,
Who cling e'en now to life? . . . .
I must have sought my death the moment when
Disgrace did come on me : do I expect
To open a path for me to heaven, that I
Extinguish not my life though stained with shame?
I sent my Lord to hunt for me the deer
That came as bait, and on his trace I forced
My Lakshman good, with many an insult heaped,
Against his will; and lo, the Rakshasa
Has parted me from Ram and brought me here
To this accursed town. Can e'er the earth
Hold me if even after this my life
I do not end? . . . .
And shall I live to have the finger of scorn
Pointed at me by women chaste and pure
As one who parted from her Lord and lived
In Rakshas lands? And then, ah wretched me!
When Ram shall have destroyed this race for e'er
And freed me from my prison, how shall I prove
My virtue uncorrupt, if he should say,
'Away, thou art now worthy of my love'?"[1]

What hope will there be left except death for a woman who has worked herself up to think like this? So she concluded:

'So death alone is Dharma's way for me.
And lo, the little merit I have earned
Has sent the guardians of my body fast
Asleep. And where can I a better place
Discover to cast my life away?'[2]

So saying, she stepped towards a bower of jasmine creepers. But before she had walked many steps Hanuman presented himself before her, his heart agitated with grief and joy; and saluting her with joined hands, he addressed her saying,

'Behold me, mother, I am the messenger of thy Rama. Numberless are the Vanaras scattered the world over to look for thee, but as a result of my austerities in the past I have the unique fortune of setting my eyes upon thy feet. Though lamenting deep thy loss, Rama knows not where thou art, for

[1] V v 11-13, 15, 17, 19, 20. [2] V v 21.

if he knew thinkest thou that the Rakshasa race would not have been uprooted till now? Doubt me not, O thou who art pure as the sacrificial lamp, for I shall tell thee about matters that Rama alone can know.'[1]

After some hesitation Sita decided that he could not be a Rakshasa in disguise, and that he might be a *Rishi* or a god as his thoughts and words looked pure. And then saying to herself,

'What matters it if he a Rakshasa be
Or god, or Vanar king? And let him come
With violence in his thoughts or ruth; he melts
My heart pronouncing soft my lord his name,
And sheds a ray of light in th' utter dark
Of my soul; is life a dearer gift? My heart
Goes out to him: his words are choice, and free
From guile: and tears flow free from his love-filled eyes
While he does sob aloud: I'll therefore speak
To him,'[2]

she asked him who he was.

These words of Sita impress upon the imagination of the reader the devotion of Hanuman for Rama and all that belong to him, and his tenderness towards the helpless. By these few words, again the poet introduces to us as if without any art, the beginnings of the devotion of Hanuman for Sita and the grateful and tender affection of Sita for Hanuman which characterise their feelings towards each other in the future as the events unroll themselves.

Hanuman gave her his name and told her the story of the death of Vali and the coronation of Sugriva, and of the sending of millions of Vanaras all over the earth to look for her. Look at his generous praise of his fellows of whom he says,

'Each one of them can lift the earth on high
And cross the ocean stream.'[3]

And now he speaks of Rama!

'And from the spot at which, thy jewels bright
Were found by us, thy Lord wist thou

[1] V v 22-25.
[2] V v 27, 28.
[3] V v 32.

Must have been carried towards the south ; and so
He took me 'part, and did entrust me, mother,
With a message for thine ear : his love, can it
E'er go in vain ? '[1]

He continued,

'And then, what can I say
Of how he felt when he was shown those jewels ?
Weren't they giver of life to him ? Believe
My word, O mother, it was those jewels thou
Hadst thrown behind thee saved thy *mangal*[2] string
Intact ! '[3]

Hanuman then concluded saying that Angada had come to the further shore at the command of Rama, and that he himself had crossed the sea at the bidding of Angada to look for her in Lanka.

The stanza in which Kamban describes the feelings of Sita when Hanuman finished his story is full of the highest pathos, but is very difficult of complete rendering into English. He says,

He ended : joy ineffable did fill
Her breast—her dried up limbs did swell with life
New found ; and as the tears flowed freely from
Her eyes, from her reviving lips a cry
Escaped, 'Is life, in sooth, come back to me ? '
And then she said to Hanuman, 'O Sire,
Wouldst thou describe to me my Lord his form ? '[4]

Hanuman's description of Rama's person is done only in the conventional style. But if Kamban now and then submits to the conventions of the rhetoricians of his time, it is only for a time. For before he goes very far, he spreads his wings for flight and rises again to the highest regions of poetry. Thus after Hanuman's

[1] V v 34.

[2] The *mangal* string is the string on which the sacremental jewel called *mangalya* is strung. It is tied round the neck of the bride at the time of the marriage. It is only at the death of the husband that the string can be untied or cut. Hanuman means that but for the sight of her jewels Rama would have died of his grief for Sita, and that Rama's seeing them alone saved her from widowhood.

[3] V v 35. [4] V v 37.

description of Rama's physical appearance, the poet describes Sita's condition and Hanuman's further speech in these words :

Ev'n as a piece of wax when put in fire,
The heart of Sita melted away as he
Described to her Rama's manly form. He fell
Again at her feet, and said, " O mother, deign
To list to words that Rama bid me say
To make thee trust in me : 'Recall to her'
Said he, 'that when I prayed her to remain
At home and serve my mothers, as forest paths
Were thorny, wild, and steep, her eyes grew red,
And with a cloth of bark put on, she came
And stood beside me. Tell her on the day
That we for the jungle started, hardly had
We passed the city-gates when she did ask,
'Where is the forest, dear ?' Again remind
Her,' said thy Ram, 'that when Sumantra[1] left
Us on the forest bounds, she clean forgot
Her grief and sent a message to her birds
And parrots left at home !' " He ceased, and then
Thinking that he had said enough, he showed
To her the ring on which her Rama's name
Was carved.[2]

We shall refer the reader to chapter XV for a description of the effect that the sight and touch of the ring wrought upon Sita. The ring finally dispelled all her doubts and suspicions and a new hope now entered her heart. She blessed Hanuman for thus saving her life with the message of Rama. She then learned from him all that had taken place after she was parted from Rama. When Hanuman, however, said that he crossed the ocean from the mainland to Lanka, she found it hard to believe it. She, therefore, asked him how he could cross the sea without a boat. He said :

'Just as those, mother, who meditate on the holy feet of thy Lord cross the endless ocean of Illusion, even so I crossed the black ocean stream with my feet.'[3]

But as this did not satisfy her, he showed to her his *Vishvarupa* —the gigantic, world-filling form in which he flew across the sea. Says the poet :

[1] the charioteer.
[2] V v 59-62.
[3] V v 97.

Saluting her still with his joined hands, he grew in size till his head almost touched the roof of heaven and he bent himself for fear lest his head should actually strike against it. The gods wondered when they saw that universe-pervading form, whether absolute power belongs to elements five that compose the world or to Hanuman alone. The stars in the heaven looked like fire-flies hanging to his hairs—so high he stood and so huge he looked! Eyes could not take in his size nor the mind conceive his form; one could not ascertain which were the sun and the moon and which the ear-rings shining in his ears. . . . . And in that form he could see with his own lotus eyes the eyes of gods and men looking to him for their protection and safety from Rakshasa violence.[1]

When Sita saw the *Vishvarupa* of Hanuman she felt that, with such an ally as he, Rama could destroy the Rakshasas with ease. But while on the one hand she was satisfied with the exhibition of Hanuman's strength and might, on the other hand she could not bear without a sense of fear the sight of that world-pervading form; and so she prayed him to resume his original shape. Hanuman obeyed her, and when he stood before her as an ordinary normal Vanara, she sang his praises thus:

''T were little if I say thou canst the earth
Uproot, and lift her with her stable hill,
Or take the hooded snake that bears the world
Aloft and make of it a plaything light
In thy hand! Thou hast the strength of the raging storm:
Is it a praise indeed to say that thou
Didst cross the sea that does not hide its head
In shame? Thy single prowess will suffice,
O long-armed hero, to extend the fame
Of Rama and his grace, and make them live
For untold ages green in the minds of men.
What pity Lanka's isle is not beyond
The oceans seven, for to demand of thee
The exercise in full of all thy might! . . .
Whenev'r I thought of Rakshas might and power
I used to fear that Ram had none besides
To help him but his brother: but now that fear

1 V v 100-102, 104.

Has left me quite, for what is Rakshas might
When he has such a hero for ally?'[1]

All trace of her despair and grief had now left her soul. She felt herself free of all care and even full of joy. She therefore continued,

'Even if death does come to me, I can
Now pass away in peace, for even now
I feel as if I'm from this loathsome prison
Released. And lo, I shall be soon avenged
Upon the cruel Rakshas who must fall
With all his race destroyed. And what do I
Desire now more? My Lord his holy feet
Have now adorned my head and Glory 'gins
To shed her light on me, and no disgrace
Will ev'r attach itself to Sita's name!'[2]

The large soul of Hanuman, however, is not elated at her praises. His reply is full of modesty and the praise of his companions and his leader. He says,

'O thou, chaste as Arundhati,[3] more numerous than the sands of the sea are the Vanara leaders who serve Rama. I am but a humble servant of those mighty chiefs, obeying the commands that they lay upon me. Seventy *Vahinis*[4] is the total of our Vanar force. Is this ocean large enough for them even if they set themselves to drink each but one handful of water from it? It is because he did not know the whereabouts of this Lanka that it is still undestroyed. Can it long remain on its foundations now that we have seen it? Vali's brother is there and Vali's son, and Mainda and Tumind and the fierce Kumuda.'[5]

Hanuman gives an impressive list of the Vanara leaders and concludes,

'They can lift this earth and even the other worlds from their foundations. And they are as obedient to Rama's will as his very arrows. What are these Rakshasas to them?'[6]

1 V v 109, 110, 112. 2 V v 113.

3 The wife of Vashistha and the ideal of chastity.

4 Armies. In the latter-day world of mere men, this term meant a detachment of an army consisting of 81 elephants, as many chariots, 243 horse and 405 foot. Some put it at three times this figure. But here the term obviously stands for very very much more.

5 V v 114-116. 6 V v 117.

After saying everything calculated to give her hope and courage, Hanuman told her that he would like to carry her on his shoulders and place her at the feet of Rama. But her innate sense of delicacy would not let her consent to it and she only sent instead a pathetic message to Rama through him. She accompanied the message with her head-ornament which she desired him to give to Rama as a pledge of her affection and her trust in him.

At last walking round her in devotional homage Hanuman took leave of her and walked away. But once again alone, he wanted to leave a memorial of his visit to Lanka, and after some thought he decided to destroy the grove and provoke a quarrel with the Rakshasas and put his prowess to the best use in Rama's cause. Things happened as he wished, for the mischief that he committed in the grove was bruited abroad and Rakshasa after Rakshasa, and army after army were despatched against him by Ravana. But not one Rakshasa returned alive even to tell the story of the fate of the armies. At length even Aksha, the son of Ravana, was crushed to death by the mighty paw of Hanuman. The reader will remember how Indrajit chid his father for not measuring earlier the strength of the Vanara and thus having been the cause of the death of his own son.

When at length Indrajit came with his big army against him, Hanuman was not terrified, but on the contrary was glad to meet such a famous foe. He thought within himself in this wise when he came in sight :

> The prowess I have shown in killing some
> Of these heroic Rakshasas has had
> Its quick effect ; for here I see the foe
> Of Indra coming on. It matters not
> If now I fall or conquer him, for great
> Will be the fame in either case. If I
> Succeeded in killing him, 'twill be as if
> Ravan himself has fallen crushed beneath
> My arm. And he would know his end is come,
> And send our Sita back ; while Rakshas pride
> Would lick the dust, and Indra'd come again
> Into his own. [1]

Hanuman scattered and destroyed Indrajit's forces, and at length engaged with Indrajit himself. Hanuman fought with the

[1] V xii 25-27.

branches of trees while the Rakshas assaulted him with his arrows. The fight continued for long and Indrajit's bow itself was broken by Hanuman. At last seeing no other way to end Hanuman, Indrajit sent the *Brahmastra* against him, and it bound his limbs and made him prisoner. Although the *Brahmastra* is the most shattering weapon known to the heroic armoury, Hanuman had been granted the blessing of invulnerability against it by Brahma himself in former times, and so he was merely overpowered by the weapon and not killed.[1]

He was dragged by the Rakshasas and Rakshasis in his temporarily helpless state and placed before Ravana by Indrajit. Ravana was sitting in state surrounded by his ministers and courtiers and musicians and dancers, and when Hanuman was brought before him his very sight angered Hanuman as the sight of the cobra would rouse the wrath of the eagle. His first impulse was to break asunder the noose that was still holding him in its bonds and spring upon Ravana. He thus revolved the matter in his mind :

> 'When on his bed I saw him sleep, I thought
> It was not just to kill him unawares :
> Now that my luck had made him sit upon
> His throne, I shall not further think, but shall
> Now fall on him, and felling down his heads
> Shall free our Sita, and take her back to Ram.
> If in the presence of Gods and Danavas,
> Who guard in terror Sita's bowery prison,
> I do not clip his crowned heads, what'll be
> The worth of all my courage and my might ? . . .
> 'Twill be a shame if after seeing him—
> The chance of a full life-time—I do return
> With only words exchanged with the Rakshas king.
> I need not even conquer him : I'll have
> Renown if ev'n I die in fight engaged
> With him.'[2]

But presently he grew more collected and looked at the situation in a different light. Now he argued within himself in this wise :

1 Brahma's blessing also limited the bondage to an hour and a half.
2 V xiii 56, 57, 59.

'He looks too strong for me to kill—his power
Does forbid hopes of easy victory.
And can a mortal triumph over him
But Ram ? He cannot conquer me if fight
Begins, nor can I hope to bring him down.
And days unending will elapse without
Success : so wisdom rules against a fight.
And has not Rama sworn that he would lop
Himself the serried heads and branching arms
Of Ravana and free the world of fear ?
And Sita's oath does stand that she would end
Her life, if Ram does not within a month
Invade these realms in force : I shouldn't therefore
Engage in doubtful fight, and waste my time.
So I shall stand before the Rakshasa
As carrier of the message of my King.'[1]

So Hanuman took upon himself the job of ambassador and waited to be questioned by the Rakshasa. We have extracted Ravana's questions and Hanuman's answer in the first pages of this chapter. After saying that he was serving Rama, Hanuman assumed to speak on behalf of his own king Sugriva and advised Ravana to send back Sita to Rama and save himself. Ravana only grew indignant at his presumption and ordered his attendants to kill him. But Vibhishana interfered and dissuaded Ravana from putting him to death saying that a messenger sent by a king should never be killed. Ravana agreed not to kill him but desired to give him some punishment, and so he directed that his tail should be tied round with cloth and all sorts of combustibles, and set on fire.

Sita when she heard of it trembled for Hanuman's safety and prayed to the God of Fire not to burn him, and lo, though the fire played all about him, enveloping him in flames, Hanuman felt cool upto the very marrow of his bones !

When Ravana desired to punish Hanuman, he counted without his host. For as soon as his tail was on fire, Hanuman freed himself by force from the guards that were holding him on either side, and jumped about the whole city flourishing his tail in every direction. The whole of Lanka was soon in flames. All that was made of silver and gold in the city erected by the hand of the heavenly architect melted in the flames. Groves and parks and

[1] V xiii 61-65.

theatres and palaces caught fire and crashed down. Elephants and horses died, and chariots were burned to ashes. Rakshasas and Rakshasis ran for their lives all over the city. The cries of women and children and dumb suffering animals filled the sky. In a few hours the whole of Lanka so fair to look on—the cynosure of all eyes in the universe—became a mass of cinder and ashes.

As soon as Ravana saw Hanuman jumping about, he commanded his guards to recapture him, but that was impossible. Hanuman seeing the miraculous escape of Sita's grove alone from the general conflagration, attributed it as well as his own immunity from fire to Sita's unique chastity, and making a last salute to her and receiving her last message he got upon a rock, and putting out the fire in his tail sprang across the seas and rejoined his companions.

They were delighted to see him back in their midst from his great adventure, and wept, and danced, and jumped about in joy. Some embraced him, some drank him with their eyes, some lifted and carried him on their shoulders. Some brought honey and fruits and roots, and placed them before him saying that his very face showed to them that he had come back with success in his undertaking. Some looked on his wounds—the wounds caused by Indrajit and other Rakshasas in his fights—and wept tears of grief. At length after saluting Angada and Jambhavan and each of the rest according to his dignity and worth, Hanuman told them that Sita was safe and had sent a glorious message through him to Rama. Then, says the poet :

> The Vanars joined their hands in worship, and
> Their hearts with joy unspeakable filled, prayed him
> To tell the story of his flight and back
> In full. So he described the holy life
> Of Sita and her great austerities—
> And how she gave and how he brought the gem
> That would, as sign that she did live, delight
> The heart of Ram. But the story of his fights
> With Rakshasas, or of his setting fire
> To Lanka town, he passed in silence o'er,
> For he was loth his own exploits to tell.[1]

Such was the modesty of this great and mighty hero. But they inferred all that he hesitated to say, for they said,

1 V xv 9.

'The wounds announce thy struggles with thy foes,
While thy return proclaims thy victory.
The columns dark of smoke, that yonder rise
Into the sky betray the ruin thou
Hast brought upon thy enemies! What need,
Alas, of words about the strength of foes
When brought is not the queen with thee?'[1]

But all the same glad that their party was able to trace out the whereabouts of Sita, they returned to Kishkindha to place before Rama the happy results of their wanderings. Hanuman's account of his work to Rama occupies a very high rank in literature for the grandeur of its sentiments, but we shall reserve it for the chapter on Sita as it deals chiefly with her. Sugriva would not waste even a single minute—even to thank Hanuman for his great work—after receiving news of Sita, and so the whole army began to march southwards.

Hanuman now prays Rama to honour him by riding upon his shoulders, and Rama graciously complies with his request. In Valmiki the position is reversed. It is Rama that proposes that he would ride upon Hanuman's shoulders. It is wonderful how Kamban attends even to such minute matters and invests his characters with greater delicacy and sweetness. *De minimis non curat poeta,*[2] says the critic. But Kamban's chisel can carve a bee on a lotus with the same ease with which it can shape a giant or cut a battle-piece.

We have had occasion in previous chapters to speak of Hanuman's valour and physical strength, and so we need not dwell much upon them here. In fact, is not the whole *Ramayana* in a way the story of Hanuman's valour and might? There is not one opponent of his who does not at once recognise his strength and heroism. We have seen Indrajit classing him with the Supreme Three even before seeing him[3]; and when he sees him he is glad that he has such a foe to engage with. Ravana refers to the part played by our hero in the first day's battle in these words:

'My foe upon the monkey rode: (but who
Can say he only was a monkey tailed?)
The while he fought I wondered whether it be

1 V xv 10.
2 Poets do not care to bother about trifles.
3 *See* page 101 and 103.

The whirlwind that he rode, or leaping Fire,
Or Death himself. Can even Garuda
The heavenly Eagle bear the fierceness
Of that fight so lightly as that Hanuman.' [1]

When Kumbhakarna aims his terrible lance at Sugriva, and all beholders are every moment helplessly fearing that he cannot escape its force, it is Hanuman that leaps into the air and cleverly catches it and snaps it into two. And the sound of the snapping was as deep as when the bow of Shiva was broken by Rama for the sake of the fair hand of Sita!

Kumbhakarna wonders at his strength and says,

'The mind cannot conceive nor tongue can praise
The might uncommon of thy arm! Whom can
I couple with thee, who stand'st alone t' achieve
The impossible? Engage with me, and I
Shall even now abide by what I said
Before.' [2]

But Hanuman had already made and lost his bet against Kumbhakarna. So his code of honour prevented him from again engaging him, and he went his way, satisfied only with saving the life of Sugriva.

When Malyavan, the grandfather of Ravana, hears that the Hill of Drugs had been brought from the north to raise the dead in the Vanara army, he at once thinks of Hanuman as the only person who had the strength to achieve such a gigantic task. And so he says to Ravana,

'Who has the strength but Hanuman to fly
From hence and cross the Meru mount within
A trice, and bring the hill of drugs o'er here?
For he it is who has into the deep
Of things with solemn thought explored.
Who can with life escape if he uproot
This rock of Lanka and dash it against
The earth? How can we war with him? If he
Should bring the Meru mount and drop it plumb
On this isle, have we the strength to break its force?

1 VI xv 29. 2 VI xv 262, 263.

If on destruction he is bent, there's nought
To stop him from the attempt! I say 'tis fools
Alone who say that They of whom the Veds
Do speak are only Three : I do declare
That with this Hanuman, the Gods Supreme
Are Four!'[1]

In the Vanara army also, wherever there is a difficult task to perform—a task that cannot be done by ordinary Vanaras—it is Hanuman that is thought of by the leaders as the proper person to be entrusted with the same. We have seen in this chapter how Jambhavan praised him on the sea-shore, and pointed to him as the only Vanara who could cross the sea and return with success achieved from Lanka. We have seen how in the different battles he aided the other heroes at critical moments, and how often he saved the situation for the Vanara army from the mortal onslaughts of Kumbhakarna and Atikaya and Indrajit.

We have referred more than once to Hanuman having brought the Hill of Drugs in order to save the Vanara army from the effects of the *Brahmastra*. The reader will remember that Vibhishana brings back Hanuman from the unconsciousness into which Indrajit's weapon had stunned him. He takes him to where Jambhavan, the wisest of the Vanaras, was lying overpowered by the same *astra*. As soon as Jambhavan hears Hanuman's voice he exclaims in joy,

'Now all is not lost : we shall conquer yet :
We shall even now rise from this fall—we shall!'[2]

Such is his faith in Hanuman.

He then asks Hanuman to save Lakshmana and Rama and the seventy *Vahinis* of Vanaras by bringing the Hill of Drugs from the north. The rolling stanzas which Kamban puts into the mouth of Jambhavan, describing the route which Hanuman ought to take, and those in which the poet describes the flight of Hanuman are a treat to the lover of Tamil poetry, and will call to the mind of the English scholar the sonorous stanzas of Byron on the *Ocean*, both in the beauty of rhythm and the grandeur of the images that they suggest to the imagination.

[1] VI xxv 3-5. [2] VI xxiii 20.

When the Hill of Drugs wakes up Lakshmana and the Vanara army as if from sleep, Rama embraces Hanuman and with tears in his eyes thanks him in these words:

'Once we were born of Dasharath, O friend,
But those our bodies now are dead which took
Their birth from him. And now we're born again,
And thou it is to whom we owe this birth!
O thou that savedst us from o'erwhelming ruin,
Thou hast enabled us to fight again
Our foe, and saved our vows and honour dear
As life, our ancient line and Ved itself!
And as thou didst my brother save, and all
This host from the jaws of death, may never Death
Approach thy frame: live thou for ev'r and ev'r!'[1]

When once again Hanuman saves Lakshmana, Rama's words to him though few are full of tenderness and soul. Says Rama,

'O great one, Fortune has blessed me with thy love and friendship: what can I lack in life?'[2]

Hanuman's tender regard for Sita is one of the finest traits in his character. In this chapter itself, the conversation between Sita and Hanuman, and Hanuman's soliloquies that we have translated would show his chivalry and devotion to that paragon of women. And can the reader have forgotten Hanuman's behaviour and words when Indrajit cut off the head of the automaton made to look like Sita?[3]

We think we have spoken of Hanuman both in this chapter and elsewhere sufficiently to give a tolerably living conception of the hero whom not only Kamban but all lovers of Rama love as their very *Guru* and God. But as we have said before, from the moment that he enters on the scene, Hanuman absorbs to himself an interest equal to that of Rama or Sita, and the three last books of the *Ramayana* must be studied from beginning to end in order to obtain a full and adequate mental picture of the great Vanara hero who came into the world 'to remove the helplessness of Dharma'. The parting words which Kamban puts in the mouth of Rama when after his happy coronation he sends Hanuman back from Ayodhya to his own Kishkindha are very beautiful, and are a measure of Hanuman's place in the story. Says the poet:

1 VI xxiii 111-114.
2 VI xxxi 46.
3 *See* page 105 *et seq.*

And turning full on him his eyes that rained
Affection and love, he said, 'There's none like thee,
When dangers hedge us round, to free us from
Their fangs and lead us to shelter safe!
What guerdon can I give thee for the help
Invaluable that thou hast rendered me
I' th' past? Embrace me, O my hero brave!'[1]

What reward indeed can be greater than embracing the sacred body of Rama whose beauty painters could not paint or sculptors chisel, and which none but Sita, not even the *Rishis,* were given to touch in that incarnation.

But Hanuman's modesty and devotion would not allow him to put himself on a plane of equality with his master. He just hung down his head and stood aside—thus showing to the world how true merit always effaces itself avoiding public recognition. We shall also leave our hero in this same attitude, only pointing to him as a beacon light to those who desire to achieve greatness in this world and the next.

[1] VI xxxix 20.

CHAPTER XIII

RAVANA

In this chapter we take up the study of the character and exploits of Ravana, the great enemy of Rama, as depicted by our poet. Ravana's chief characteristic in our story is his unholy passion for women. But he is much else besides. He is a Rakshasa learned in the Vedas, handsome with the handsomeness that strength and the consciousness of valour give, who by great austerities has acquired immense strength and invincibility and victory in war. He has conquered the Devas and the Asuras and the Yakshas and the Nagas, and exercises sway over the Three Worlds. In former days he had fought with every being considered powerful and had always either conquered them or made friends with them. The very mammoths that bear the universe on high from the eight extremities thereof had owned him victor after having had their tusks broken, while charging at his breast. Even the Supreme Trinity desisted from interfering with him, for austerities must always have their full effect till their strength was exhausted, and his austerities were not ordinary. He had been defeated only twice—and that only in single combat—once by Vali and another time by Kartavirya Arjuna, but in spite of these defeats he continued as ever before to be the master of the universe, these enemies never thinking it possible to remove him from his throne.

These are the antecedents that Valmiki himself gives to Ravana. Generally speaking, his delineation of Ravana is worthy of the antecedents that he presupposes for him. He depicts him as a hero proud and fierce and full of the authority that comes of supreme power. Everybody obeys Ravana's slightest word. None dare question his acts or even his orders. Where anybody has to differ from him, he expresses his opinion with due deference and after profuse apologies. But in one or two places Valmiki has forgotten himself and has lowered the dignity of Ravana. When, after being maimed by Lakshmana, Shurpanakha returns to Lanka, Valmiki makes her address Ravana thus :

'Wilt thou absorbed in pleasure, still
Pursue unchecked thy selfish will ;
Nor turn thy heedless eyes to see

The coming fate that threatens thee?
The king who days and hours employs
In base pursuit of vulgar joys
Must in his people's sight be vile,
As fire that smokes on funeral pile.

. . . .

How, heedless, wicked, weak, and vain,
Wilt thou thy kingly state maintain?
Thou, lord of giants, void of sense,
Slave of each changing influence. . . .
Thy counsellors are blind and weak,
Or thou from these hadst surely known
Thy legions and thy realms overthrown.

. . . .

Enslaved and dull, of blinded sight,
Intoxicate with vain delight,
Thou closest still thy heedless eyes
To dangers in thy realm that rise.
A king besotted, mean, unkind,
Of niggard, hard, and slavish mind,
Will find no faithful followers heed
Their master in his hour of need.

. . . .

O weak of mind, without a trace
Of virtues that a king should grace,
Who hast not learnt from watchful spy
That low in death the giants lie.
Scorner of others, but enchained
By every base desire,
By thee each duty is disdained
Which time and place require.'

And how does Ravana receive this gratuitous and meaningless insult from a woman?

As thus she ceased not to upbraid
The King with cutting speech,
And every fault to view displayed,
Naming and marking each,
The monarch of the sons of night,
Of wealth and power possessed,
And proud of his imperial might,
Long pondered in his breast.

Bhaskara, the Telugu poet, just follows the lead of Valmiki and makes Shurpanakha reprimand Ravana with bitter words thus :

'Glorious indeed is the manner in which thou and thy favourites are ruling the realms under your sway! Ye are perfectly satisfied with your low pleasures. Thy powerful arms that lifted high the Kailas mount, now hang useless by thy side ; the glory of thy authority that extended over the three worlds has now lost its lustre : thy arms have been victorious all over the worlds as far as space extends, but the light of thy victories has now grown dim : thy fame that has been flourishing up to now has now begun to fade away.

'For when I gave out that I am thy sister, it only provoked my injurers the more, and this is the way they have dealt with me innocent! And still they live! Verily I cannot find words bitter enough to address thee, O hero of the serried heads, valiant in battle as Rudra himself!'

Tulsidas too repeats the same scene of Shurpanakha reprimanding Ravana in his audience-hall, as if Ravana, though her brother, was not the proud and hitherto undisputed ruler of the universe. He puts such words into her mouth as,

'Thou spendest thy time in revelries and sleepest both day and night' etc.

Contrast these with the way that Kamban represents the meeting of the maimed sister with her brother :

She entered the northern gate of the city with her hands joined over her head as a suppliant. . . . The Rakshasas that looked on her grew red with rage ; some spoke words like thunder ; some could not speak at all ; their eyes rained fire and they bit their lips ; some were heard to say, 'could Indra have been guilty of this sacrilege ? or could it be Brahma ? or may it be Shiva ? Others would answer, 'where are the foes that we can point to in this universe ? It is impossibe that any in this triple universe should have attempted this deed : it must be the doing of some from the Worlds beyond.'

The music of the *Vina* and the *Mridanga,* of the *Yal* and the flute, of the *Shankha* and the horn, all were hushed that day in Lanka and only lamentations were heard for the fate of Shurpanakha.

While all Lanka was thus immersed in grief as she walked along, she reached the audience-hall of Ravana and fell at his feet as a cloud settling at the foot of a hill. Darkness fell over the universe as pall. Adishesha, who is bearing the earth on his shoulders, was terrified as to what would happen when Ravana's anger was roused, and bent down his head. The mountains of the earth shook. The Sun was beside himself with fear. The mammoths that bear aloft the universe fled, and the Devas concealed themselves in nooks and corners.

With smoke rushing through his mouths even as he bit his lips with his teeth, his very moustaches trembling and smelling with the fire of his breath, with his teeth giving out the sheen of lightning while he ground them in his anger, he thundered out, 'whose deed is this?'

She replied, 'There are two men who are like him whose standard is the fish.[1] They are protecting the earth from ills and live in the forest; there is none that can compare with them in beauty of form; it is they that cut at me with their swords!'

When she said it was men that did this injury to her, he laughed a laugh that resounded to the very ends of the earth, his eyes radiated fire, and he asked, 'Is this all that these feeble hermits have done; or have they done anything more? Fear not thou and speak thou without concealing all that befell.'[2]

Kamban represents Shurpanakha as still under the infatuation of her passion for Rama and Lakshmana, and makes her describe their beauty and prowess with extreme warmth, at the end of which description she gives out that their names are Rama and Lakshmana and that they are the sons of Dasharatha.

When he had heard to the end, Ravana broke out thus:

'Tis men that've maimed my sister dear as life,
And having maimed her they're yet alive? And still
His sword in hand and bitten not with shame,
Lives Ravan yet, not even hanging down
His eyes or heads! . . . . . .
Behold they live who have offended me:

[1] Manmatha—the Indian Cupid.
[2] III vii 24-29, 36, 45, 46, 49-51.

And lo, my sword is by my side ; my arms
Unparalysed do hang ; the years that Shiv
Has blessed me with are running on—I live !
Art thou ashamed, O heart ? and fearest thou
To bear the dire disgrace ne'er felt before ?
Think not thyself too weak : thy heads are ten,
And twenty are thy arms, full strong enough
To bear this weight of shame !'[1]

So saying, and with his eyes flashing fire, he asked, 'And what were Kara and the Rakshasas doing without killing these feeble men ?'

As soon as he asked this question, tears gushed from her eyes as if from a fountain. She struck her breast and fell down upon the ground. Again joining her hands she began, 'thy kindred all are dead, O Sire !', and continued thus :

'As soon as they heard my complaint, Kara and the rest of the bull-like heroes rose with their troops and marched against them, but all of them fell within a space of four hours, struck by the arrows of the lotus-faced prince called Rama.'

When he heard that his brethren had died at the hands of a man, and who fought only singly, grief and indignation struggled in his heart, and tears flowed and lights flashed from his eyes as rain and lightning play about a storm-cloud. The grief that was submerged under the fire of his anger now acted like ghee[2] and roused it into a flame ; and he asked her, 'What is it that thou hadst done them, that they laid violent hands on thee and chopped thy lips and nose ?'

'My fault,' she began, 'it related to a woman whose waist is like the lightning, whose tender arms are like the bamboo stem, and whose colour is that of pure gold. I imagine she is Lakshmi herself who has left her lotus home and lives with Rama !'[3]

'And who is She ? asked Ravana, when she began thus :

'Her name is Sita : blessed is the earth
That bears her tender feet upon her lap.
Her bosom shines like cups of burnished gold :
The music of her voice recalls the sounds

1 III vii 58, 60, 61.
2 clarified butter.
3 III vii 67.

Of woods, and groves, and honey tender-sweet.
Her tresses rich adorned with flowers, she is
A queen among the fair of heavens! If she
Who dwells i' the lotus is not worthy ev'n
To be her maid, how can I make thee feel
Her beauty? Like a deep-black cloud do show
Her tresses fair, and also falling rain.
Her feet are cotton-soft, her fingers show
As corals tender-red. Ambrosia she
Has robbed, and lo, her ravishing speech doth flow
Therewith. And though her face is not larger than
The lotus, her eyes are deeper than the sea!
They're fools who say that Manmatha was burnt
By fire of Shiva's eyes. This is the truth:
He saw this damsel and smitten was with love
For her form; but being spurned by her,
He wasted sheer away and a martyr died
To love—such is the beauty of her form! . . . .

Shall I her arms describe, or the swords [1] that rove
Upon her gold-bright face? Or shall I praise
Her other charms? I am confused for I
Have not the skill to paint her lovely limbs
In words! But thou wilt surely see thyself
Tomorrow: why should I thy time consume?
If once her charms are thine, O Sire, thy heart
Can never rove again and all thy wealth
Thou'lt place at Sita's feet: and mark my words:
Thou'lt bless me for my pains when once thou look'st
On her: but all thy queens will vent their hate
On me—for verily I bring them nought
But ruin.' [2]

After rousing Ravana's passion for this unseen beauty, Shurpanakha now reveals the motive which induced her to do so. She tells him:

. . . . . . 'Possess her, immerse thy soul
In love, while all the world shall sing in joy
Thy marriage song: a guerdon now I claim:
Put forth thy valour and, defeating Ram,

[1] eyes.

[2] III vii 68-71, 73, 77.

Wed me to him, for, him I love as life.
Though great the merit earned by austerities,
As destiny doth rule us all, no good
Can come to us except in its own time.
For, Sire, 'tis only now that thou art given
T' enjoy th' advantage of thy twenty eyes
And arms! 'Tis such a fair that I did try
To bring for thee, when Lakshman brother of Ram,
Attacked and wounded me. I hurried here
To tell thee this, and after telling all,
To go and end my life disgraced for ever!'[1]

Here in this conversation we see how Kamban keeps high the prestige and dignity of Ravana. His sister talks to him as a suppliant and not as a virago who is used to treat her brother with scant courtesy. See also how our poet exploits to the full the dramatic possibility of the situation. Shurpanakha coming as an injured suppliant with hands over her head, the remarks of the Rakshasa people at the unheard of insult to their power and prestige, Ravana's indignation at the sight of the wrong to which his sister had been subjected, his self-deprecation that in any part of his dominion such an ignominious insult should be offered to his sister, the bringing in of the reference to Khara at the psychological moment—all these are contrived and arranged with the *justesse* of the trained master-artist.

Here also we may note, in passing, Kamban's just taste in the matter of the architecture of the epic. Those who have finally arranged and revised the Benares and Southern Recensions —which agree with each other very closely—of Valmiki's *Ramayana* have not exhibited in this part of the story that apprehension of *bhavika* which they so generally exhibit in their recensions. In Canto XXXI of the Forest Book in these recensions, a Rakshasa named Akampana, after acquainting Ravana of the prowess of Rama continues thus :

'But guile may kill the wondrous man :
Attend while I disclose the plan.
His wife, above all women graced,
Is Sita of the dainty waist,
With limbs to fair proportion true,
And a soft skin of lustrous hue.

1 III vii 79-81.

Round neck and arms rich gems are twined :
She is the gem of womankind.
With her no bright Gandharvi vies,
No nymph or goddess in the skies ;
And none to rival her would dare
'Mid dames who part the long black hair.
That hero in the wood beguile,
And steal his lovely spouse the while.
'Reft of his darling wife, be sure,
Brief days the mourner will endure.'

This plan pleases Ravana and he goes to Maricha and tells him :

'My guards, the bravest of my band,
Are slain by Rama's vigorous hand ;
And Janasthan, that feared no hate
Of foes, is rendered desolate.
Come, aid me in the plan I lay
To steal the conquerer's wife away.'

Maricha, however, speaks of the great prowess of Rama and advises Ravana to give up his dangerous ideas. He says,

'And pacified and self-possessed,
To Lanka's town return.
Rest thou in her imperial bowers
With thine own wives content.
And in the wood let Rama's hours
With Sita still be spent.'

Ravana takes the advice and returns to Lanka. Then Shurpanakha comes to Ravana's court and after reprimanding him, gives an account of Khara's fall, Rama's beauty and prowess, and Sita's charms and advises him—she also as Akampana—to steal away Sita. Ravana again flies to Maricha, to demand his help. This conversation between Maricha and Ravana, though much more elaborate, is constructed as if the first visit and conversation had not taken place at all.

This is such an obviously faulty *bhavika* that we cannot understand how the commentators like Govindaraja and others did not correct the error and remove the incident of Akampana and the first meeting with Maricha from the story. It is a still

greater wonder that Bhaskara copies even these re-duplications in his rendering of the *Ramayana*. Kamban, as the reader would have noticed, has cut away the Akampana incident altogether and concentrates all his poetry and art in the elaborations with Ravana.

The Passion of Ravana for Sita, being the *bija*—the seed—from which grow all the subsequent incidents of the story, we should have expected Valmiki to have emphasised and elaborated it at the end of the conversation between Shurpanakha and Ravana. But neither in Canto XXXVI where Ravana tried to persuade Maricha to disguise himself as a deer in order to inveigle Rama and Lakshmana from the side of Sita, nor in Canto XL where he threatens Maricha with death if he does not obey his direction, does the Samskrit poet lay emphasis on Ravana's passion for Sita.

We shall see how Kamban sows the *bija* and develops it. When Shurpanakha had finished the description of Sita's person, says the poet:

> all his anger and valour and sense of shame now left his heart, even as all good emotions leave the soul into which sin has gained entrance. Now lust and the pangs that accompany lust became like two fires and mingled with his soul. Struck by the arrows of Manmatha,[1] he forgot Khara, he forgot the strength of his arm who maimed his sister, he forgot the disgrace that had befallen him, he forgot the limits of the blessings received by him, but he forgot not the fair of whom his sister spoke.
>
> His thoughts and the name of Sita of the slender waist had ceased to be two and had become but one single current: had he now another mind to leave off one of them and to take only the other? How else could he forget her? Can even the learned conquer lust unless they have acquired wisdom.
>
> Even before he brought away the fair one whose form was like unto the peacock, the Lord of Lanka imprisoned her within the dungeons of his heart! And thereby his heart began to slowly melt away even as butter when placed in the sun.
>
> Because his own destiny egged him on from behind, and because his actions and thoughts of the past were maturing

1 The Indian Cupid.

in order to bear their appropriate fruit, and also because the days of his prosperity were fast approaching their appointed end, the pangs of his passion grew more and more intense even as the seed of evil secretly sown by an ignorant fool. And Manmatha acquired the strength to hit the Rakshasa, for in passion lies the force that can wear away strength.[1]

Kamban then describes the pangs of the Rakshasa filled with his lustful thoughts. The whole description amounting to eighty stanzas is an extravaganza in which Kamban submits to, or rather, he joyously and riotously follows the examples set by earlier epic-poets and by his period. Thus he depicts Ravana as feeling a burning sensation all over his body—the result of his passion for Sita. The cool breeze that blows from the sea only roasts his limbs. He goes into a grove with spreading and shady trees and tries to rest in a summer-house or a bed of new-plucked flowers. But though it is mid-winter he cannot bear the heat. He roars, 'I hate this season, change it.' At once winter disappears and spring takes its place. 'But what can cure those men who have drunk the poison of love?' So, displeased with it, he calls for the autumn. That season too does not suit him, 'Let there be no seasons!' he commands, and then all the seasons disappear and Lanka shines like heaven itself where there are no seasons, but one uniform and entrancing flow of time. But even then the body of the Rakshasa continues to burn, for, 'what is there in times and seasons? Unless one conquers passion with self-restraint one can never escape its stings.'

Then he calls for the moon, and then the sun, and finally the night, and each one of them comes trembling at his bidding. The darkness is 'palpable', 'visible', 'thick', 'black like a heart without ruth'. In the night Ravana sees the form of Sita floating before him in the form of a coral creeper. He raves about her and at length calls Shurpanakha and asks her to tell him whether the form before him is the very woman that she had described in the morning. But she on her part raves in her passion.

She says:

'The figure that stands over there is that of Rama of the strong bow, with his lotus-eyes and lips like red fruit, with his broad chest and strong arms and long beautiful flower garlands. Behold he stands like a blue hillock.'[2]

But when he says that the figure that he sees is female in shape, she replies that men in love are used to see the forms of

[1] III vii 82-87. [2] III vii 149.

their loved ones projected before their mind's eye as if they are real persons. To the question how it is that she saw the form of Rama, she satisfies him by saying that ever since he maimed her she could not forget him. He asks her again 'what will become of me who am suffering these tortures on account of her!' She then gives out the suggestion which is the seed of all the subsequent action of the *Ramayana* :

> 'Thou art the undisputed master of the universe. Why art thou then hesitating to act? Go to the place where she is and capture her for thyself!'

It is after this that Ravana consults his councillors and then hurries to where Maricha was leading a retired life, to persuade him to help him by his wiles to capture Sita.

We have given a resume of this extravagant scene, in order that the reader might see Kamban as he is, both in his strength as well as in his weakness. Although Pandits of the old school will go into ecstasies over these verses, critics whose taste is corrected by a comparative study of the Western as well as Eastern poetry cannot but condemn the extravagances in which Kamban indulges in these verses. But the beauty and merit of our poet is that there are few occasions in which he offends the taste of even the most exacting of critics. On the other hand, the richness of his poetry, and the general justness of his taste, and his architectonic skill are so conspicuous that these defects look only like the dark spots in the sun.

But even this extravagance, faulty as it is when taken by itself, serves a very necessary purpose in the scheme of the story. For, what but such an intense and unreasoning passion could make Ravana cling to Sita to the last, in spite of his own terrible defeats, and the loss of Kumbhakarna, Atikaya, Indrajit, and even his reserve force? So although we should like that this passion had been described in a more natural manner, we cannot but admire Kamban's instinct in deciding that it ought to be described very elaborately in this part of the story. This passion of Ravana for Sita is not, however, the vulgar lust of a depraved heart, but the tender and delicate desire of a heart that desires reciprocal affection. He wants to conquer Sita's heart and win her willing love. He does not desire to force her hand. There is indeed the story and Kamban speaks of it in more than one place, that there is a curse on him that, the moment he tries to unite with a woman against her will, his head would burst into a hundred

fragments. But our poet depicts Ravana as if he genuinely, and not for fear of the curse, desired the willing affection of Sita. And so the words he addresses to Sita are always full of a rare delicacy, taking every circumstance into consideration. At the first meeting with Sita in the forest of Dandaka, Valmiki makes Ravana speak bluntly to her like a vulgar wooer of her beauty. Though coming disguised as a *sanyasin,* Valmiki's Ravana tells her, among other things,

> '*Thy charms of smile and teeth and hair*
> *And winning eyes, O thou most fair,*
> *Steal all my spirit, as the flow*
> *Of rivers mines the bank below.*'

His speech also lacks consistency with itself. For while very soon, without any further ado, he is going to announce himself as Ravana, the words,

> '*Leave, lady, leave this lone retreat*
> *In forest wilds for thee unmeet,*
> *Where giants fierce and strong assume*
> *All shapes and wander in the gloom.*
> . . . .
> *Here giants roam a savage race,*
> *What led thee to so dire a place ?*'

are more calculated to injure than help his cause.

Sita is not indignant at this vulgar and almost lascivious admiration, but tells her story at his request, and in the end asks him as to who he is. His reply can hardly be called delicate. He says,

> '*Lord of the giant legions, ...*
> . . . .
> *Ravan the Rakshas king am I :*
> *Now when thy gold-like form I view,*
> . . . .
> *My love, O thou of perfect mould,*
> *For all my dames is dead and cold.*
> *A thousand fairest women, torn*
> *From many a land my home adorn.*
> *But come, loveliest lady, be*
> *The queen of every dame and me.*'

We shall see how Kamban presents the first meeting of Ravana and Sita.

As soon as Lakshmana left the cottage, Ravana disguised himself as a hermit with a triple staff in hand, in order the better to deceive his victim. His body was now thin as if he had worn it away in fasts. He wore a tired look as if he had been walking a long distance. He chanted the Vedas to the accompaniment of the *Vina* on which he was playing himself. He stepped with the softness of flowers falling on the ground—he could not have been more circumspect if the earth he walked on was spread over with fire. Sita took him for a hermit of pure thought and welcomed him.

The flood-tide of passion was agitating the sea of his heart and his frame was suffused with sweat as he saw with his eyes—her who was the crown of beauty, the home of honour, and the queen of chastity. At her sight his strong shoulders swelled and shrank. It is little if we say that his eyes were intoxicated with the sight of her beauty even as bees get drunk with the dripping honey of the flowers ; the intoxication of his heart alone could compare with that of his eyes. He thought to himself, 'Can these twenty eyes be sufficient to drink in the beauty of this fair one who has left her lotus home and come to live here below ? What pity I have not a thousand unwinking eyes ? It is to enjoy the ocean of this damsel's charms that I have been blessed with three crore years and a half of mortal life and all the other blessings that my austerities have earned.'

Again he thought, 'I shall make her queen of all the three worlds and appoint all the *Asuras* and Devas with their wives to obey her every command, and I shall myself obey her slightest wish.' Another mood came on and now he said to himself, 'If this is the loveliness of her face, when she is under a cloud of grief, what must be the charm of her heavenly smile ? I shall give away my throne to my sister who discovered this beauty to me'. While he was thinking on these things in his passion-inflamed breast, Sita wiped away a falling tear from her eyes and offered him the mat made of rushes to seat himself. He took his seat placing the triple staff beside the mat. [1]

Although Kamban fills in here the picture quite differently from Valmiki, he does not hesitate to take a hint from Valmiki

[1] III viii 20-22, 26-34.

for some sublime images which he imports into this scene. So before he takes up the conversation between Sita and Ravana, he prepares a grand background by saying that when the Rakshasa sat there revolving his nefarious purpose in his head,

> The mountains trembled at the Rakshas' sight,
> And trees a tremor felt from lowest root
> Up to their topmost height. The birds grew dumb,
> While beasts in terror crouched, and cobras stole
> Away with shrunken hoods ![1]

The student of Milton will here recall to mind those sublime lines in the Ninth Book of the *Paradise Lost* wherein the poet makes Nature feel responsible for the huge misfortune that was about to befall the human race through the act of Eve :

> " So saying, her rash hand in evil hour
> Forth reaching to the fruit, she plucked, she ate !
> Earth felt the wound and Nature from her seat
> Sighing through all her works gave signs of woe
> That all was lost."

The conversation between Ravana and Sita in Kamban begins in this wise :

> He sat and sitting asked, ' who is the sage
> That liveth here ? And tell me, lady, who
> Art thou ? ' When large-eyed Sita thus replied :
> ' The chief of Dasharatha's royal race does live
> In this retreat with his devoted brother :
> And he has taken to this forest life
> In obedience to his high-born mother's commands ;
> Thou must have heard his name, O holy Sire ! '
> ' I've heard of him,' he said, ' but know him not,
> Though once I wandered by the realms that 're laved
> By Ganges holy stream. But who art thou,
> And who's thy sire, O dame of large bright eyes ? '
> ' I am the daughter,' Sita said, ' of sage
> Janaka who honours holy men like thee
> As Gods. My name therefore is Janaki,
> And I'm the wife of Rama of the race

[1] III viii 35.

Of Kakutstha. Now holy sir, thou seem'st
To hail from far off lands, for tired is
Thy look. I pray thee tell me, whence dost thou
Thy holy person bring?' [1]

In reply to this question, the pretended holy person fell to praising Ravana and his glories. After giving a glowing account of his sovereignty, beauty, and power and valour, he continued thus:

'Though countless are the beauteous damsels who
Desire to call him Lord, he hasn't given
His heart to one of them: he is searching earth
And heaven for one who could delight his heart.
I passed these days in Lanka where he reigns:
But as a longing came on me to join
My friends in holy endeavour, I left
His realms and am come back to Janasthan.' [2]

The reader will notice the art with which the conversation is pushed on and the dexterous manner in which Ravana is made to lay siege to Sita's heart. No expression escapes the lips of Ravana, which is indelicate, rough, or rude. Ravana works only by suggestion, and very remote suggestion at that. The suggestion is so remote that Sita does not notice it at all at this stage and only asks him,

'O sir that should'st regard the body ev'n
As weight unbearable, how didst thou choose
To dwell in the city of the sinful beings
Who honour not the Ved's or Brahmanas
And who do eat the flesh of living kind?
Thou left'st the forest-land where sages live,
Nor didst thou care for the fertile realms where men
Of holiness do congregate, but lived'st
Amidst those Rakshasas of wicked life.
What hast thou done, O Sire of holy vows?' [3]

And then the colloquy continues thus:

The Rakshas thus replied: 'O lady fair
We who have conquered evil, how can we fear
The Rakshasas as cruel beings! And if

[1] III viii 36-40. [2] III viii 49, 50. [3] III viii 51, 52.

Thou want the truth, I trow they are not worse
Than gods. In sooth, I find the Rakshasas
A friend invaluable to men like me.'
When Sita heard his words she thought within
Her heart, 'he is no holy man who thus
Associates with evil ones—he is
Of those who follow with their lips alone
The path of holiness.' She did not know,
Poor innocent, that the wily Rakshasas
Could at their will assume whatever shape
Or form they pleased ; and so she didn't suspect
A worser guile. [1] . . . .
The wily Rakshas felt at once that he
Had raised suspicions in fair Sita's breast,
And thus attempted he to smooth them down.
'And thou must call to mind, O Janaki,'
He said, 'that when the Rakshasas do rule
The worlds without a peer, what can we do
Of holy endeavour unless we walk
Their way and earn their friendship and their love ?' [2]

The substance of the subsequent portion of this interview till Ravana reveals himself as he is, has been given at page 15 *et seq.*,[3] and so we shall not translate it here. We have, however, we hope, placed sufficient material before the reader to enable him to judge for himself the difference between Valmiki and Kamban in the description of Ravana's courting, and consequently in the delineation of Ravana's love for Sita.

In the second interview also between Ravana and Sita, which takes place in the Ashoka grove, when Hanuman sits concealed in the foliage of a tree close by, Kamban preserves this same delicacy on the part of Ravana very carefully. Valmiki on the other hand makes Ravana blunt and rough in this interview also.[4] He makes him begin his speech thus :

[1] III viii 53, 54. The reader will recognise a flavour in these lines similar to that in the lines in the Third Book of the *Iliad*, where Homer speaks of Helen's ignorance of the fate of her brothers :
'So spake the fair, nor knew her brothers' doom,
Wrapt in the cold embrace of the tomb.'

[2] III viii 55.

[3] At page 15 *et seq.* a bare outline only has been given ; for a fuller account see the Chapter on Sita.

[4] This interview is really the third in Valmiki. For he intervenes unnecessarily another interview between Ravana and Sita as taking place immediately after they reach Lanka.

'Why dost thou cover thy breasts and body at sight of me, O thou whose thighs are like the trunk of an elephant? I desire thee O Sita; look upon me with favour!'

Observe the enormous difference of tone in Kamban. He says:

What was to him a poison mortal, he
Thirsted to taste, as if it was the drink
Immortal, and his speech he thus began:
'O *Koil* sweet of the slender waist, when wilt
Thou look on me with ruth? . . . .
The days are passing one by one away,
And this is all the kindness thou hast shown
To me! Mean'st thou t' accept me when I'm dead—
Aye, murdered by thy cruelty? . . . . . .
O thou who'rt lovely like a tendril of gold,
Thou dost despise my throne of high renown!
But granting that thy husband liveth yet,
And thou canst see again Ayodhya town,
Wouldst not thou find the joys but human joys?
And what's the highest blessing *tapasvins*
Desire? It is the joyous life of those
That do my favours win by service leal!
O Sita, life and youth are transient,
Thou canst not youth enjoy for long: if all
Thy days of youth are wasted thus, when dost
Thou hope to reap the fruits of life? 'Tis not
For me, I grieve: I shall die willingly,
If that's thy wish: but if thy heart is turned
To bitterness, show me another one
Beside thyself for charm that never cloys,
And love and beauty's perfect shape.
Shall Janak's race in female loveliness,
And strength of mind and other noble charms
Alone be rich, and wilt thou make men say,
That it does lack in tenderness and ruth
And has a niggard heart? . . . . . .
When all thy good deeds of the past, betimes
Matured, are come to yield thee golden fruit,
Wilt thou for spite despise the fruit and sulk
Away? . . . .
Thou canst, if thou my prayer grant, acquire

With ease a glorious name as saviour proud
Of the Rakshas race : dost thou the shame prefer,
To be pointed at as its destroyer fell ?
Fortune has placed within thy reach, unasked,
Th' imperial crown of all the worlds, and wives
Of gods will be maids to wait on thee ;
And thou dost scorn the gift ! Was ever fool
Like thee ? O scorn it not but do accept
Me as thy slave, who rule the triple worlds
Without a rival or a peer ! ' He ended :
And raising his hands above his serried heads,
He fell prostrating at her feet.[1]

If the love of Ravana for Sita is of a higher type in Kamban, it is, as the reader will have seen here and elsewhere, not the less deep or less passionate or less absorbing. No defeat, no death—death even of his nearest and dearest—will induce him to part with her or give up the hope of making her his own. It is only when Indrajit had fallen on the field that in a paroxysm of grief, he rushes sword in hand to kill her, but the words of Mahodara cool him and he becomes himself again. In a fancy of Mandodari, when she laments for her fallen lord, our poet has concentrated all that can be said of the depth of Ravana's love for Sita, and with that we shall close this phase of Ravana's character. Kamban makes her say thus :

' The noble frame that lifted high the hill
Of Shiv is pierced through and through by darts :
There is not even space for a ses'mum seed
To rest o'er all its vast expanse ! Did Ram
Desire to sound and see the exact spot
Where did reside my Ravan's mighty spirit ?
Or did that hero's conscious darts believe
That love for Janaki might yet remain
Concealed within that handsome frame, and did
They probe for it, o'er every needle-point
Of space therein ? '[2]

It is not always, however, that Ravana's heart was so fully engrossed by passion for women. It is only after hearing about Sita that passion for women became the predominant note of his

[1] V iv 24, 26-29, 31-37. [2] VI xxxvi 239.

character. But before that, love of power, love of warlike enterprises and love of glory were the chief characteristics of the great Rakshasa. Even after the entry into his soul of this inordinate passion for Sita, glory and love of military achievement occupy a very high place in his heart. So, when Maricha tries to dissuade him from his nefarious attempt to steal Sita away, Ravana replied to one of his arguments in these words :

> 'My sway is undisputed o'er the worlds :
> If new foes rise what can delight my heart
> Better ?'[1]

Thus again during the first interview with Sita, he cannot bear her remarks against his prowess, although she is speaking to him not knowing who he is, he being still disguised as a wandering hermit. So,

> When she these stinging words did speak, his eyes
> Flashed fire : he ground his lightning-laden teeth
> Which crashed out thunder : and his false form burst,
> Revealing all his branching arms and crowns
> Upreaching to the sky.[2]

It is this sense of honour that makes him feel acutely the ignominy of the maiming of Shurpanakha by Rama and Lakshmana. When Hanuman had burnt the city of Lanka and escaped alive, he feels the shame of it more keenly than the loss of his immense treasures or even the destruction of his capital. He says in his council after the rebuilding of the city by the architects of the heaven :

> 'The world resounds with bruit of our disgrace,
> And yet I am not dead, but sit with pride
> Upon this throne . . . .
> The air of Lanka smells with tresses singed
> Of Rakshas dames, and yet we sit in peace
> As if enjoying th' odour . . . .
> If the Vanara at least had fallen killed
> By Rakshas swords, our honour might have been
> Redeemed : but now we're drowned in ignominy.'[3]

1 III vii 199. 2 III viii 64.
3 VI ii 12-14.

Again, when Sugriva leaps on him, the while he was observing the enemy's army at the commencement of the hostilities, and after a hand to hand struggle with him plucks away the gems on his crowns, he feels acutely the shame of such a defeat and says to himself ; 'It were better if I had died.'

And where except perhaps in Milton's Satan, can we find greater pride or determination than exhibited by Ravana in the course of the war ? Ravana's authority is greater than Satan's : none dares question his authority, none dares even to presume to advise him except Kumbhakarna. And see how he treats Kumbhakarna when he advises him, and how Kumbhakarna submits to his will the moment he sees that Ravana is threatened. It is true that Indrajit uses bitter words to Ravana, and Danamala is even harder as her words are more taunting. But in both these cases it is in the paroxysm of their grief that these words escape their lips. And on both these occasions, Ravana himself was grieving along with them for the loss of his valient sons on the field.

Note, however, Indrajit's concern for the honour of his father, even at the moment that he reprimands him for sending Aksha against Hanuman after he had shown such prowess. For when he sees Aksha's body on the ground he says :

> 'Alas 'tis not my brother lying dead—
> It is my father's glory faded lies
> Upon the ground.' [1]

And, after the third battle with Lakshmana, when he advises Ravana to send Sita away, see how submissive Indrajit's tone has become. He is afraid even to say that it is through Ravana's passion for Sita that all these misfortunes have befallen them. He merely says,

> 'Our race hath sinned or such a powerful foe
> Arises not for us.' [2]

Such is the awe with which Indrajit regarded his father. And need we recall to the reader the reply of Ravana to this suggestion of his son, to the sublime sentiments and haughty tone of which very few passages in World literature can afford a parallel ? In

[1] V xii 5. [2] VI xxvii 4.

how many epics can we find sentiments and language[1] like the following ?

. . . . . . 'Think not that I did count
On those my men who are already fallen :
Think not I counted on the crew that's yet
Alive. Think not I hoped that thou wouldst beat
My foes upon the field : in my sole right arm
I placed my trust and I provoked this war !
. . . .
Ev'n if I lose, if Rama's name will stand,
My name, will not it also stand as long
As Veds are sung on earth ? And who canst death
Escape that comes to all ? We live to-day,
To-morrow finds us not : but glory, doth
It ever die ? . . . .
. . . . Die I may
But can I stoop to shame and littleness ?'[2]

And in the mouth of how many of the creations of poetic genius will such words appear as natural as these do in the mouth of Ravana ? In fact, Kamban has carved his Ravana in such proportions that no words that may be put into his mouth can be too brave or too exalted for his moral stature.

Now, while Ravana is proud and exacting when what he thinks to be his honour is concerned, he is not without deep affection for his brother and sons. In fact his love for them falls short only just a little of his love of glory and honour. We have seen how he melts into tears when Kumbhakarna starts for the field. When messengers come and tell him that Kumbhakarna has fallen in the field, he falls down unconscious like an uprooted *sal* tree. Says the poet :

From childhood's days they had not lived apart :
Though two their bodies, their life was only one.
When such a brother died, and for his sake,
The heart of Ravan broke in two, he swooned ;
And thus lamented he his fate aloud :

1 We always refer to the words of Kamban and not to our translation, the inadequacy of which, we realise more keenly than the hardest of critics.

2 VI xxvii 8, 10, 11.

'O brother, who hast destroyed the Danav hosts,
As a tusker does the o'er-grown lotus pond!
O hero, who erased'st great Indra's name
From the list of kings! O first of Rakshasas!
Lived I so long alone to hear these words?
O thou of the flashing lance, thy dear face
Is hid from me: I speak these words and yet
I cling to life! If thou hast gone, O brother,
In the hardness of thy heart abandoning me,
Who will believe again in brotherhood's love?
If thou art fallen thus upon the field,
Would not yon Indra go in triumph back
To his celestial realm? And Danavas
Who live in terror of our eye, wouldn't they
Our valour mock and try to walk erect?
O thou, to whom the Meru hill was but
A scrubbing stone at bathing time! The word
That thou art killed by th' arrow of a man—
That word doth burn me to the quick and doth
Consume my heart with shame. . . . . . .
The triple lance of Shiva blunt fell,
And disk of Vishnu, and the thunderbolt
Of Indra, King of Heaven lost their force,
The moment they did touch thy adamant chest!
And do I hear it said the feeble darts
Of yonder men had power to pierce thy frame?
And so I hear it said they're strutting o'er
The field in glee, proud of this victory?
. . . .
'While thou wert marching proud in victory
To victory, I had my fill of the joy
Of life, but now that thou art dead, my brother,
I do not care to live. I cannot live
Alone, nor shall I let thee go alone:
I come, my elephant proud, I come, I come!'[1]

Similarly, when Atikaya's death was announced to him, tears gushed forth from his eyes: he sobbed and stood like a sea agitated by the changing emotions—dashing one against another—of grief and shame, and pity and indignation, and heroic determination. Now he would look in the direction of the battle-field; now he would look at the Devas standing around; now

[1] VI xvi 83, 86.

he would think on the unbearable shame of his son's defeat and death ; now he would look at his sword that had earned for him so many triumphs ; now he would wring his hands in despair. Now like a mad man he would in turns smile and weep, frown and crouch in shame. Now he would think of demolishing the vault of heaven ; now he would think of lifting the earth ; now he would think of destroying all life in one fell swoop. Then he would think of cleaving in two the bodies of all who bore the name of woman. But when this thought would cross his mind, he would feel the pang as of a wound that is seared by fire. None around him did open his mouth. None even dared to breathe. Those who stood by him suppressed their very thoughts. Such was their terror when his heart was thus torn with grief. But it is the news of Indrajit's death that causes him the greatest grief. For, unique was the love that he had for this son ; and unique the pride that he felt in his prowess and achievements. People knew the intensity of his love so well that those who brought the news from the field trembled and shook 'to the very root of their teeth,' and just stuttered out the words 'Thy son has fallen today'. The *tapasvins* and the *Devas* and the *Devadasis* and others who stood by his side vanished from there, fearing that in the first paroxysm of grief and anger Ravana would surely end the world. When he heard the words, his eyes flashed fire, and he drew his sword and with one fell sweep he beheaded the messengers who brought him the news. Such was the madness of his wrath and grief.

He then fell down on the ground, and 'boiling like the churned ocean when it vomitted forth the poison,' he bewailed the loss of his son thus :

> He would cry out 'O my child !' ; he would call out 'O my great son !' Now again he would cry, 'O my life, do I yet live when thou art dead ?' He would ask, 'Has Indra been avenged ?' and again, 'did the doomed Devas shout in triumph at his fall ?' and once again, 'are Shiva and the thief who has taken refuge in the Sea of Milk now freed for ever of their terror ?'[1] . . . .

The poet then puts one lament each into each of the ten mouths of Ravana. Though this looks rather too artificial, there are some fine thoughts in these stanzas which are worth being placed before the reader :

[1] VI xxviii 7, 10, 11.

With one mouth he would call out 'O child!' With another he would ask, 'Shall I yet sit on the throne and rule?' With the third mouth he would accuse himself saying, 'O thou of powerful arms, can I continue to live who have delivered thee over to the foe?'

Another mouth would lament, 'Thou hast not embraced me, O son, with thy powerful and beautiful arms; while another would cry aloud, 'shall a deer eat up a tiger cub?'

With another mouth he would exclaim, 'Art thou really dead, my son? I have lost in thee the best of friends. Is it guile or treachery that overcame thee?' And then he would say, 'Wilt thou not come to me?' And then again, 'I have become alone, all alone! My heart breaks and fear has seized on me!'

With another he lamented, 'Death must have lacked courage to face thee and take thy life away, O son of measureless valour! To what other world then hast thou gone unknown even to me?'[1]

After bewailing thus at his palace, Ravana rose and went to the battle-field to search for the body of his son.

He searched the heaps of the slain for the body of his son. After a long search he found his mighty arm, its grip of the bow not loosened, though it was severed from the trunk. Tears fell down his cheeks and his heart melted at the sight as the ghee in fire. . . . He took the arm—long and beautiful like the body of a cobra—jingling with the sounds of armlets and bangles, and quivers and darts infixed in it, and placed it like a holy relic on his head. He would embrace it with his arms; he would put it round his neck; he would touch his eyes with it with great devotion; he would put it again on his head; he would swoon away; he would sob again. At last he saw the body like a vast ocean and he fell on it and wept. He took the body, and with tears welling up from his eyes, pressed it to his bosom and groaned. Who has ever felt the pangs that he did feel at that time?

He would pluck the darts from the body one by one, and even break to pieces the darts thus plucked; he would suddenly fall into a swoon; he would kiss the body and embrace it; he would desire in his wrath to crunch with his teeth the sun and all the seven worlds.[2]

[1] VI xxviii 16, 17, 19, 22.   [2] VI xxviii 26-32.

He then searched for the head, but could not find it anywhere upon the field. So he concluded that the men must have carried it away; and the thought pierced his heart as a wound reopened. And he once again burst forth in lamentations in this wise:

'I could the mammoths tame that bear the earth
Aloft; I could the hill uproot and lift,
On which the great God three-eyed sits enthroned;
All these were feeble foes enough. Are men
Alone to be too strong for me? O fie
On me that bear this load of shameless life,
And see them live unscathed, who've killed my son
And carried off his head! And I have burnt
Fair Alaka[1], and Indra's spacious realms
As food to fire consigned, and have I ruled
The worlds without a rival all these days,
Only with these my eyes to see my child's
Fair limbs devoured by greedy jackals vile?
O bitter is my food than food of dogs!
Of those who proudly marched to war with him,
I see not one alive; all, all are fallen,
While, of the foes, the men are yet alive!
Nor is that monkey killed; and many stand
Unharmed: Is not the valour of Ravan great?
If thy Khandarpa, Yaksha, Siddha wives—
The fairest of the fair, whose very speech
Is music soft—if they, O son, should come
And falling at my feet should cry, 'O give
Us back our lord!' shall I my tears join
With theirs and weep with them, ev'n I who have
Vanquished the God of Death himself in war?
In days gone by I've carried fire and sword
To Indra's realms, and had them brought beneath
My sceptre strong; but now to passion fallen
A slave, the funeral sacrifices, which
I' th' course of nature thou shouldst offer me,
I have to offer thee with mingled tears
And sighs! Who's there like me in all the worlds?'[2]

It now remains for us to consider the valour and exploits of Ravana. In fact, it is his valour and great prowess and

1 The capital of Kubera's kingdom.
2 VI xxviii 35-39.

invincibility on which the whole story of the epic is based. For, it was because the gods could not themselves destroy his tyrannical power that they went to Vishnu and prayed to him to come down and destroy him, and that He consented to incarnate Himself as 'the emperor's holy son'. The power and the unrivalled conquests of the Rakshasa loom large over the whole background of the *Ramayana.* When Rama enters the forest, Agastya and the other *Rishis* come and pray to him to free the world from Ravana's tyranny saying :

> 'For untold years we have been suffering from the tyrannous rule of Ravana, who has acquired the sovereignty of the three worlds by his endless *tapas.* Who can overpower the mighty Ravana, who makes the Devas flee before him and carries away their wives, who makes the very confines of the universe resound with the cry of his enemies and plunders all their wealth ? . . . We see the Rakshasas spread themselves up to the farthest worlds, but nowhere can we find the holy Devas. Shiva has loaded the Rakshasas with all his blessings and sworn that he would not raise his hand against them, while Vishnu has been often defeated by them. Brahma is able to get on with his work only by flattering them, and the sun and other planets are only lately released from their prisons in the land of the Rakshasas.' [1]

It is with these and similar exploits behind him that Ravana comes before us in the *Ramayana.* And so it is that the hyperbolic language, which Kamban puts into Ravana's mouths and of others concerning his prowess and exploits, does not sound incongruous or absurd but quite consistent with his character and stature. We shall take one case as an instance. In his interview in Janasthan, just before revealing himself, Ravana says to Sita :

> 'Dost thou want the Meru Hill to be uprooted, or the vault of heaven to be broken, or the ocean to be stirred to its depths, or the fire in its bosom to be extinguished, or even the earth to be lifted on high ? Which of these is impossible to Ravana, whose words are few but deeds are mighty and many. Who dost thou take Ravana to be, O innocent one ?' [2]

Though ordinarily speaking, this is the language of wild exaggeration, we feel no incongruity even as we find none in the

[1] These are six poems which are to be found in some editions of *Kamba Ramayana* between the 14th and 15th poems in Book III *padalam* iii.

[2] III viii 62.

battles of the Angels in the *Paradise Lost*, where

"Millions of fierce encountering angels fought
On either side, the least of whom could wield
These elements and arm him with the force
Of all their regions."

And our poet has, by his grand style as well as by the attitude he gives to other characters in the presence of Ravana, succeeded in giving the impression of reality to these hyperbolic descriptions of the valour and power and physical strength of the Rakshasa. The reader will remember readily the contrivances that Kamban makes in order to create this impression. We shall, therefore, give here the translation of but one passage out of the many scattered in all parts of the *Ramayana* and especially the *Yuddha Kanda*, the cumulative effect of all which passages is to make more distinct and to intensify the impression.

After the Vanara army had crossed over to Lanka, Rama sends an ultimatum to Ravana asking him either to deliver Sita or come out and fight. It is Angada, the son of Vali, that was selected to go and deliver the ultimatum personally to Ravana, for Rama said :

'If this time too we send our Hanuman,
Our foes will think there's none besides him here
In all our host to dare the Rakshas power,
And fearless enter Lanka town. I wish
That Angad go today ; for, even if forced
To fight, he has the valour, force to force
To meet, and safely to our side return.' [1]

Angada made his respects, and springing into the air like a lion, he flew into Lanka with the swiftness of Rama's arrow, brimming with joy with the thought,

"Now who of all the Vanaras are like
To me, for with his holy lips my Ram
Has said, 'If Hanuman is not to go,
Whom can we send but Angada ?' " [2]

When Angada dashed through the streets of Lanka, the Rakshasas fled in terror, believing him to be Hanuman come back to desolate their city once again. Such was the appearance and

[1] VI xiii 9. [2] VI xiii 13.

powerful aspect of the mighty son of Vali. But this hero, when he sees Ravana seated, listening to the accounts received of his foes and inspecting with pride his army as it was marching to the field, wonders at his strength and thinks within himself in this wise :

'We pride ourselves upon our having crossed
Yon puny strait, and what have we but stones
And trees with which to fight ? Has e'en the God
Of Death the force to vanquish him ? Then who
Can meet the Rakshasa of the shining arms
Upon the field on equal terms ? I see
A feeble ray of hope in Rama's bow.
But that I see that he has come to battle
In person, who did with a single dart
My father's chest pierce through—my father great
Who triumphed o'er this Ravana himself—
Can I believe there lives a living man
Or God who can defeat this mighty giant ?' [1]

And then Angada impresses on us the same idea by another turn of thought. He continues :

'Who has the might to kill this Rakshasa,
Though broken by his unrequited passion ?
And so I think that none is stronger than
My uncle brave, who yesterday did spring
On him and tore from off his crown the gems,[2]
As Garud tears its gem from the cobra's hood !' [3]

We have now described the main traits of Ravana's character, so far as is possible within the limits of space we have fixed ourselves. We shall close the study of the great enemy of Rama with a short description of the two great battles which he fights with him.

When Angada returned from the palace of Ravana he told Rama, in reply to his inquiry about the success of his embassy, that

'His passion wil not bate till all his heads
Do roll upon the ground.' [4]

and so Rama gave his final orders for the battle.

[1] VI xiii 16, 17.
[2] *See* page 250.
[3] VI xiii 13.
[4] VI xiii 43.

Rocks and tree-trunks were, in accordance with his instructions, thrown in the moat surrounding Lanka town, and a bridge made for the Vanara army to march up to and escalade the walls of the city. They were divided into four divisions, each of which marched and established their line at the four gates of the city. The scouts of each of these divisions sprang upon the walls and attacked with roots and trunks of trees the divisions of the enemy as they were marching out. The enemy's soldiers dislodged these scouts from the walls with great difficulty, and at length found themselves face to face with the divisions of Rama in the great plains outside their city.

The fight began on all sides in right earnest. Rocks and stones and trees were flung fiercely by the Vanara heroes against the Rakshasas, while the Rakshasas used their bows and swords, maces and lances, with terrific effect against the Vanaras. Elephants and horses rolled down on the ground, their blood running in streams to the ocean, chariots were broken to pieces, and Rakshasa heads were piled one over another like mountain boulders. The Vanaras fell in thousands and tens of thousands, and their bodies floated down to the sea in the very stream formed of their blood. Angada and Sugriva, Nila and Jambhavan, and Hanuman fought fiercely, and the Vanaras under their commands annihilated the Rakshasa armies on all the four fronts.

The Rakshasa messengers brought to Ravana the news of the failure of the armies under Durmukha, Suparsu, Vajramushti, and Prahasta. Ravana was stung with shame to hear that the despised monkeys were able to destroy the warriors that had conquered worlds after worlds in the past. He exclaimed :

"Did monkeys beat the veteran Rakshasa troops
Who brought down Indra's flag ? The word does burn
My heart like ghee-fed fire ! The Vanar mites
To beat the Rakshasas of the rock-like arms !
Well have the wise declared, 'Think not that fire
Or foes are weak, but ever keep them down.'" [1]

So saying, he ordered reinforcements to march out immediately to the support of his broken armies, and himself made preparations to take the field in person.

He did the battle-car ascend to which
Were yoked one thousand stallions fleet. It was

1 VI xiv 91, 92.

The car that Indra left as prize, when he
Did flee before the Rakshas arms, and which
Had flown over heaven, a symbol of Ravan's pride
And sovereignty unrivalled. Ocean-like
Was its grand reverberating roll. His bow
Was by his side, the bow which he, before
He took, had worshipped with devotion deep.
Can we at all describe in words its force,
When the God of Death himself with terror dies,
Whenever he hears its twang ? . . . . . .
Although the tuneful Vina was the sign
Upon his banner bright, his standard did
O'ershadow all the universe and seemed
To lick the heaven and earth like Yama's tongue.[1]

He took all the divine weapons that past austerities had armed him with, and marched to the northern front. When Rama was informed that Ravana had come to the field, he also put on his armour and girded his sword, and bow in hand, he left the camp from where he was watching the fight, and approached the fighting line with the choicest of his troops.

In the meantime, the fight between the reinforcements of Ravana and the Vanara troops was fierce and awful. There was great carnage on both sides. When Ravana at length arrived on the field and twanged his mighty bow, even the Rakshasas trembled at that resonant twang ; what then of the Vanaras ? Even the Devas were filled with terror, as if they heard the thunder of the Day of Deluge. The Vanaras turned and fled. But Sugriva who was there lifted a big boulder and aimed it straight at the Rakshasa. It came whirling through the air giving out sparks of fire, but one arrow from Ravana's bow broke it into fragments and it fell harmless. Seeing that, Sugriva tore a tree by the roots, as if tearing the very bowels of the Earth-Goddess, but, before he could aim it, the enemy sent an arrow which cut it into a thousand pieces, even in the hands of Sugriva. The latter then lifted a huge rock and hurled it on the foe, but even that met the same fate as the previous one. Before he could do anything further, Ravana sent a shower of arrows and buried them into his mighty frame, and he fell exhausted.

But just at that time, Hanuman, who had been fighting on the western front, came to know of Sugriva's condition, even as if he had been all the while by his side, and rushed to his help

[1] VI xiv 95, 96, 101.

in a trice. And then, saying :

'Wouldst thou show thy skill and battle with me, O Rakshasa, the while Sugriva gets ready to resume the fight ?'[1]

he lifted bodily a huge hillock and hurled it against Ravana with his arm, true like Veda's self. Ravana looked fiercely on him, and saying, 'Come on for thy share', sent simultaneously against it the arrows which blew it into atoms. Hanuman broke another mountain peak and aimed against one of Ravana's arms with all his force. It struck the arm true, but broke to pieces the moment it touched it. Such was the strength of Ravana's arm. Indignant at his failure to make an impression on the Rakshasa's body, Hanuman was taking a larger rock, but Ravana sent his terrific darts and pierced Hanuman's body with them.

Hanuman, however, stood his ground firm, and while the Devas were wondering whether any mortal being could have such endurance, he tore up a tree by its roots and sent it whirling against Ravana. The tree struck the charioteer and felled him down, and ricochetted and killed other Rakshasas besides. Another charioteer took the place of the fallen Rakshasa ; Ravana sent a heavier rain of arrows which buried themselves all over Hanuman's body and put him out of action for a time, while blood flowed in torrents from his wounds. As Hanuman sank on the ground, Ravana exclaimed :

'Think ye with stones and trees, and hairy arms
And fists, and shining teeth and empty words,
To vanquish Rakshas might ? When I have come,
(Though tarnished is my glory when I face
Such puny foes) and send my iron hail
Against ye, can ye hope t' escape with life ?'[2]

But, not desiring to aim at a foe already stricken down, Ravana aimed millions of darts against the Vanara troops which had reformed in the rear. The troops were agitated terribly, even as a sea that is agitated by storms. Now Lakshmana, who was in the rear, advanced to meet Ravana, like a Meru Hill armed with a bow. At the sound of his bow-string, the Rakshasa army fled as herd of elephants at the roar of a lion. He sent his arrows against Ravana, but the veteran troops of Ravana formed themselves as a guard before him and gave battle to Lakshmana. They were, however, destroyed by the unceasing rain of arrows

1 VI xiv 133. 2 VI xiv 139.

from the bow of Lakshmana. Chariots and elephants, horses and Rakshasas rolled one upon another, stricken by his cobra-like darts. Even the Devas could not say whether he was still aiming or whether he was discharging the arrows from his bow. The lances and maces and other arms aimed against him by the Rakshasas were all broken to pieces by his arrows.

Down fell the Rakshas heroes bold upon
The field, some struck by Lakshmana's fiery darts,
And some by the severed heads of their own friends.
The bow of Lakshmana won its laurel crown
On that day of days, while fiercely burned the fire,
Named Ravana's heart, at triumph of his foe.[1]

So Ravana faced Lakshmana and employed all his bowman's skill against him, but could make no impression on him. Lakshmana was able to parry all his weapons, ordinary and divine. While they were still engaged, Hanuman recovered from his swoon, and striding up between the two combatants addressed Ravana thus:

''Tis true thou, vanquished hast the triple worlds
By thy might that knew no waning; and thou hast
Destroyed the glory of the King of Heaven,
And spread thy rule to th' ends of th' universe!
But this day, Rakshasa, will be thy last!'[2]

So saying, he took the gigantic shape which he showed to Sita, and challenged Ravana again in this wise:

'Thou art a skilful wielder of the bow,
And sword and mace, and every weapon of war.
Thou art a master of the warrior's art,
And great's thy fame for valour and for strength.
But if thou dare to fight with me with fists,
With one blow of my fist I will destroy
Thy strength and skill and fame, and valour high
Renowned! Why waste more words? Although thy frame
Could not be shaken by the mammoths eight,
Or Shiva's hill, canst thou forsooth, escape
Alive when thou my matchless Vanar blows

[1] VI xiv 155. [2] VI xiv 161.

Receivest ? If thou die not when I my blows
Deliver, thou may'st, O thou of the rock-like arms,
Return my blow with all thy might, and then,
If I remain alive, I shall no more
Challenge thee on the field.'[1]

This was the first time, after Hanuman had burned Lanka, that Ravana saw him face to face and within ear-shot. While he was filled with anger for the injuries that he had done to Lanka as well as to Rakshasa prestige, Ravana admired his courage, and cleverness, and prowess, and so he addressed him in these words :

'Thou speakest like a hero, O mighty ape !
Who else but thee can fearless stand before
My presence stern ? Thy glory is as great
As th' universe itself : Can aught besides
Contain thy fame ? Though thou hast killed my kin,
And I do sit upon my chariot, bow
In hand, surrounded by my army vast,
Unarmed thou stand'st defying me ! Where is
Thy peer in all the worlds, O hero great ?
What god or Danava or mortal man
Will dare to challenge me, unless they 're seized
With madness ? E'en the Three Supreme have not
The nerve to face me thus. And thou dost stand
Rock-like, and dost invite upon thy chest
My shattering blow : Can I thy praises sing
Enough ? '[2]

So saying, Ravana descended from his car and called on Hanuman to use all his force and knock him on the chest. When Hanuman clenched his fist and struck on his chest a mighty blow,

> the hills crumbled into their component sand ; sparks came out of the eyes of the Rakshasas ; the brains of other Rakshasas came out of their heads by the shock of the blow ; some others fell down dead ; the teeth of some of the Vanaras fell out—the very roots of their hair felt the shock. The strings broke in the bows of the Rakshasas ; the sea dashed upon the shore causing deep breaches ; the eight royal mountains were split and boulders fell from their sides ; the sun gave out sparks ; the tusks of the elephants fell down ; the

1 VI xiv 163-166. 2 VI xiv 167, 169.

weapons fell out of the hands of the opposing heroes : and sparks and jewels fell down from Ravana's chest.[1]

Even Ravana felt the blow and shook like the Meru hill when the Storm-God attempted to uproot it. The gods were glad and rained flowers on Hanuman, but Ravana soon came to himself and praised Hanuman's physical strength in these words :

'I see there is some strength ev'n outside me,
And that I find in thee, O mighty one!
All else but thee I class eunuchs weak.
What! even Brahma cannot shake me, though
He sends his curse with all his spirit's force!
I own thou hast defeated me! There is
But one test more. If thou canst bear my blow—
The blow which on thy chest like a thunderbolt
Will falling strike—and after that remain
Alive, then thou canst say that there is none
In all the world to equal thee ; no foe
Would dare to challenge thee and thou wouldst live
For ever and for ever.' [2]

But Hanuman said :

'Hast thou not conquered me when thou art yet
Alive unscathed? I do commend thy strength!
Now take thy even chance.' [3]

and bared his chest to the Rakshasa. Ravana clenched his teeth, made firm his mouths and pressed his lips, and, with eyes dropping fire, clenched his fists and struck a blow on Hanuman's broad expansive chest from which at once flew sparks of fire. Hanuman reeled at the blow.

And when he reeled, the gods in heaven reeled,
And Dharma, Truth and Nobleness did reel,
And reeled the Vedas, Justice, Fame, and Ruth! [4]

But just at that minute, the Vanara heroes came on with rocks and rained them on Ravana. The very sun was concealed from sight and darkness set in—so thick was the shower of the stones

[1] VI xiv 174, 175.
[2] VI xiv 181, 182.
[3] VI xiv 183.
[4] VI xiv 185.

which the Vanaras aimed at their foe. The Devas believed that the Rakshasas would be ended that very moment. But Ravana bent his bow and, quick as thought, aimed millions of darts against them and broke their force and saved himself and his army. He rested not there. Swearing that he would end the Vanara crew and the men that day, he sent an endless shower of iron rain which wrought dire destruction in the Vanara army. Nala, Gavaya, Angada, Jambhavan—all fell pierced by the lance-like darts of Ravana.

Lakshmana saw the plight of his army and its leaders, and faced Ravana in right earnest. He parried the darts of Ravana without missing even one, and thus saved the remnants of his army. He then sent ten powerful arrows and cut down the ten bows in the ten hands of his foe. The Devas were glad. Dharma burst forth into songs of triumph and even Ravana admired the skill of Lakshmana. He said addressing him :

'Grand is thy prowess, grand thy skill in war,
And grand thy valour, and the lightning quickness
Of thine arm ! I do commend thy aspect stern,
And mastery of the bowman's art. And who
Is there to equal thee but he, thy brother,
Who brought the Rakshasas with Khara down
In Dhandak forest the other day, or he
My son, who with his single bow could break
Devendra's might, or I myself thy foe ?' [1]

And then, thinking that it would be impossible to defeat Lakshmana with any weapon that could be propelled by the bow, Ravana took the lance that Brahma had given him in the days gone by, and hurled it with all his force against Lakshmana. But before Lakshmana could think of any weapon that could overpower it, it struck him in the chest and laid him low on the field, to the terror of the Devas and the *Rishis* and to the joy of the Rakshasas. Seeing, however, that Lakshmana was not killed, Ravana desired to capture him prisoner. So he descended from the chariot and attempted to lift him with all his twenty arms. But Lakshmana, who was conscious, realised his oneness with the Infinite One, and then even the arms that lifted Shiva with his Kailas Mount were powerless to move him ! Exhausted by his fruitless endeavour, Ravana just moved from the place in order

[1] VI xiv 203, 204.

to rest his hands a little. At once Hanuman, who was watching everything, sprang to where Lakshmana was, and armed with the power of love, lifted him up as if he were a child, and dashed away to the rear.

Rama now came to the front and engaged with his mortal foe. But Hanuman safely deposited Lakshmana in the rear, and ran to Rama and begged him to ride upon his shoulders 'though they are not worthy'. Seeing the ease with which Hanuman was bearing Him, who in three steps measured the worlds, 'even Garuda hung down his head':

> Hanuman was the Sea of Milk, and Ram
> Was Vishnu riding o'er its waves, The son
> Of Vayu was the eternal Ved, and Ram
> Was *jnan* that e'er resides upon the crown
> Of Ved ! [1]

The twanging of Rama's bow was like the *attahasa* [2] of Rudra, when on the Day of Dissolution He devours the earth and the sea, and the sky with all that exists. The Rakshasas were stunned, unable to move from their places. Their tongues were parched and they trembled, and then they fled. The marshalled worlds shook in terror, and even Brahma and Shiva were afraid.

Meantime, Ravana sent against Rama seven darts, fierce as the fire of the Day of Destruction, whose force was enough to drink the ocean dry, break the earth and pierce the vault of heaven. Rama parried them with an equal number of arrows, and aimed five darts against Ravana which gave out sparks making ashamed even the *Kalagni*—the fire of the Final Day. The battle then engaged in right earnest. The Rakshasas around Ravana also aimed their arrows and lances and stones against Rama, but he parried them all and destroyed the Rakshasa's army wholesale. Hanuman kept pace with the enemy's chariot with ease and did not give any advantage to the enemy even for a moment.

> Before one could say, 'he is on the ground,' he would be high up in the air; wherever Ravana or his soldiers turned their eyes, there they would see Hanuman sure and certain carrying Rama upon his shoulders. For he was swifter even than Rama's thoughts that flew in advance of his darts.[3]

[1] VI xiv 221. [2] roar. [3] VI xiv 232.

The battle-field became veritable shambles ; the spirits who live on corpses danced for joy ; rivers of blood were flowing inexhaustible, carrying the severed heads, trunks and bodies of elephants and horses and men. The Rakshasa women were lamenting for their dead husbands, and embracing the dead bodies, themselves died as *satis* upon the battle-field itself.

At length, Death masquerading as Rama's darts had destroyed all the Rakshasas upon the field excepting alone Ravana. Ravana boiled with rage and drawing the bowstring with all his force buried two terrific darts in Rama's arms. But Rama only smiled, and aimed at his enemy's bow and broke it into two. Ravana took another bow, but before he could bend it, Rama again sent a shower of arrows which cut off the heads of his horses, brought down his Umbrella of Victory, and tore open his armour. Another chariot drew up behind him, but he was not destined to ascend it. Rama's fiery arrows tore it to pieces, and Ravana could only view him with concentrated fury. But Yama himself trembled at his scowl.

Then Rama with his invincible arrows broke the diadems on Ravana's heads, who now looked like the night without the moon or the day without the sun.

> He also looked like kings who though they stand
> Unrivalled in their wealth and sovereign power,
> Straightway their honour and their name do lose,
> The moment noble poets send their shafts
> Of stinging satire.[1]

And as he stood unarmed, his arms hanging loose like the shoots of a banyan tree, his toes scratching the ground, his faces and heads shorn of their lustre as of their ornaments, his eyes looking down upon the ground, while all the worlds were exultingly saying 'this is the fate of those who go against Dharma', Rama took pity on his plight and desisted from killing him, but at the same time he addressed him the stinging words that we have translated in another connection.[2]

So ended the opening battle of the war in which Ravana intended to put an end to his foe.

After this battle, as the reader will remember, Ravana did not come to the battle-field for many days. He had Kumbhakarna waked up, and sent him to the field. When he died, Atikaya offered to lead the army himself, and when he

1 VI xiv 249. 2 *See* page 64.

also fell, Indrajit chid Ravana for not sending him earlier, and took the responsibility of the command and led his great attacks on the Vanara army. On his fall, Ravana sent word to all the Rakshasa colonies all over the universe and assembled a big army—his whole reserve force—and dashed it against the enemy and himself took the field. Rama opposed the reserve forces single-handed, detailing Lakshmana and his army to face Ravana. The reader will remember how Ravana sent his lance against Vibhishana, and how Lakshmana bared his breast to it. When Lakshmana fell pierced by the lance, Ravana returned triumphantly to the city believing Lakshmana to be dead. He also expected that his immense reserve would bring him an easy victory. But the reserve was destroyed by the wonderful bow-craft of Rama, while Lakshmana and the fallen army were resuscitated by the drugs brought for a second time by Hanuman. Kamban describes the battles with the reserve forces in 235 stanzas with his usual power and verve, but space forbids us to even summarise that description to our reader. At length there was nothing left for Ravana but his guard, and he determined to lead them in person.

But if nothing remained in Lanka except the guard, the guard were an immense and most powerful force, and it was Ravana in his fury that now led them.

He put on the golden armour that Brahma had created at a great sacrifice, and which had been a trophy won by himself from Indra. He wore the anklets round his left ankle, at whose sound the worlds trembled as at the sound of thunder. He girded on his trusty sword and threw over his back the inexhaustible quiver of arrows to which the waters and sands, and fish of the sea and even science[1] were too small for comparison. He put on his pearl and diamond garlands, and walking out of his palace under the shade of his pearl-umbrella, he ascended his war-chariot. The thousand horses yoked to the chariot were of the highest breed—being descended, some from *Uchchaishvanas,* the divine-horse that came along with ambrosia at the churning of the ocean of milk, some from the horses drawing the chariot of the sun, and some born to the Storm-God in the womb of the Ocean Fire. Drawn by such horses,

> The car could run upon the land or sail
> The sea ; it could ascend the sky and fly

[1] Knowledge.

I' th' air ; it could the fire cross unscathed ;
And in a trice it could ascend to the world
Of Brahma's self ! . . . . and,
It was the home of Victory. ![1]

He blessed the car with many a flower thrown, made gifts to innumerable brahmans, generous beyond the dream of avarice, and ascended the car exclaiming :

'Or Janaki shall beat her breasts today
And mourn her Ram with dishevelled hair, or poor
Mandodari shall fall upon my corpse
And rend her breast in unconsolable grief !
So fierce shall be my fight if Rama cross
My path today !'[2]

He then smacked his arms in the manner of wrestlers, and at the thundering sound the vault of the sky clove into two, the mountains split, the earth felt as if a wound was opened in her side, and even the sun fled from his golden car. He twanged his bow in high joy at the coming final fight, and at the terrible twang the hills burst to pieces and the Danava and Deva women touched their *Mangal*[3] strings fearing danger for their lords. And then proudly bearing himself like the thousand-headed *Adishesha*, to the terror of all beholders, he drove his chariot to the battle-field surrounded by his troops. The Supreme One and all the immortals saw the ocean agitated, the Devas filled with terror, and every living thing shaken with dread at the furious aspect of the Rakshasa.

Vibhishana informed Rama of Ravana's appearance in the car at the head of a vast army, and of the flight of the Vanaras at his approach, and Rama at once made preparations himself to go to the front. He determined not to spare Ravana today. He put on his arms and girded on his sword, and saying :

'This day shall bring an end to Sita's grief
And suffering of the Gods for once and all.'[4]

he took his bow and quiver of arrows. As he was about to start,

1 VI xxxiv 20, 23. 2 VI xxxiv 26.
3 Symbol of the married state for women among Hindus, like the wedding ring.
4 VI xxxv 2.

Matali the charioteer of Indra brought him the car of Indra at the command of Shiva and the Devas.

> Is it the chariot of the Sun? Is it
> The overpowering light that is to shine
> On Dissolution's Day or can it be
> The Meru hill? This car is larger far,
> More brilliant. May this be the peerless car
> Which in its bosom bears the Three Supreme? [1]

Its inside was filled with innumerable divine drugs that could heal any wound or cut, and its roll was like that of the sea when the storm beats on, and tides on tides drive one against another upon its bosom.

In answer to Rama's enquiry, Matali told him that the Devas sent him the chariot of Indra in order that he might fight on equal terms with Ravana who was riding his miraculous car. A suspicion rose in the mind of Rama that this might be a trick of Ravana, but the conscious horses yoked to the car chanted the Vedas in order to dispel the suspicions of Rama. Rama looked at Lakshmana and Hanuman, and asked them what they thought of it. And when they said that Matali's words could be believed, he ascended the car and steered against the Rakshasa.

Ravana bit his lips when he saw that the Devas had sent Indra's car to his enemy, and determining to take his revenge on them after finishing Rama, he ordered his charioteer to direct his car straight on him. The Vanara army that had fled at the sight of Ravana, now reformed and advanced without fear when they saw the miraculous car of Indra come to Rama, and believed that now that Rama was equally equipped and armed, Ravana was sure to be defeated at his hands. The Vanaras began their battle with their usual weapons. But Mahodara prayed to Ravana to permit him to engage Rama, and asked him to contain Lakshmana and his troops on the other side. Ravana agreed and turned towards Lakshmana's front. But Mahodara could not long stand against Rama and soon fell struck by a single arrow of Rama. Ravana, therefore, hastened towards Rama who destroyed the Rakshasas in their millions. Of the others, those that did not fly away stood apart, and Rama and Ravana faced each other at length, even as Wisdom and Evil Deeds, as Knowledge and Ignorance, as Righteousness and Sin in their final

1 VI xxxv 17.

conflict. They looked as *Garuda,* the King of eagles, and *Adishesha* of the thousand hoods engaged in mortal cambat ; and like two of the mammoths bearing the universe ready to dash against each other ; and even as Vishnu and Shiva fighting as to who is more powerful.

Ravana blew his conch that was ever used, by the thunder of its resonance, to create trepidation and terror in the hearts of gods. But then, without Rama's knowing it, his five divine weapons had taken their place by his side in the car, and his *Panchajanya* [1] now sounded of its own accord, feeling jealous of Ravana's conch.

Matali also sounded the conch of Indra, making the heaven, and sea, and the mountains tremble. The sound of *Panchajanya* and Indra's conch delighted the hearts of the *Devis* of heaven and they turned on Rama the arrows named their glances, even before Ravana's darts began to shower on him.

The twang of Ravan's bow was like the roar
Of all the oceans seven heard at once :
While twang of Kodanda[2] was like the chant
Of Ved Eternal on the Final Day.[3]

Even Hanuman and the other leaders were terror-stricken at the sight of Ravana and his host. They were filled with despair not knowing what to do or where to turn. Ravana's war-shout and the sounding of his bow were unbearably terrific. The roar of the sea and the thunder of the clouds that are heard even now are only the reverberations of that war-shout and twang ! He shouted, 'I shall either lift up Rama with his divine chariot and dash him to the earth, or destroy his chariot with my arrows, powerful as the thunderbolt, and capture him prisoner with his bow !' So shouting he aimed his arrows in veritable showers. They came like thunderbolts and like fire, like death and like rain, and they were longer than the cobra that was tied round the Mandara mountain to churn the ocean. Rama parried them with a similar shower of arrows aimed with equal force. The combined shower

Did cover the earth and sky, and hills and seas ;
The eyes of even gods could see in all

1 Vishnu's divine conch is called *Panchajanya.*
2 Rama's bow.
3 VI xxxvi 35.

The world naught but these iron-shafts. Can ev'n
Men of Wisdom ever count them? Darkness spread
All o'er the universe and there was fire
Burning all living kind—such was the fight
Of Ravana and Ram. And even Shiv
Wondering, did exclaim, 'Was ever fight
Like this?'[1]

As Rama parried and destroyed with his arrows all the darts that Ravana aimed against him, the latter thought he should try other weapons, and so he hurled lances and axes and maces against Rama. But they too were cut into pieces by Rama's sharp-pointed arrows. Rama now buried ten darts into the body of Ravana, who, furious like the elephant goaded by the steel-goad, rose into the sky with his chariot. From the sky he showered a hail-storm of arrows against Rama and the Vanara army, and so Rama ordered Matali also to rise up into the sky with his car. And lo, it came over that of Ravana even as the globe of the sun over that of moon. The chariots now made their evolutions in the air, each warrior trying to take the other at a disadvantage. The evolutions were so rapid that even the gods could not tell which was Rama's car, and which the Rakshasa's. Meteors fell down, dashed against by the wheels of the chariots. There was no hill whose summit was not broken, no direction that escaped from the conflagration set in by the arrows and *astras* of the combatants, no living being that did not vomit blood in terror.

The chariots steered over the seven oceans and the continents seven, over the seven royal mountain ranges, and over the seven worlds. The walls of the universe were the only limit they respected. They pursued each other like the whirlwind and the thunderstorm, and yet the horses were not tired on each side.

Ravana at length saw his opportunity and sent a crescent-shaped arrow, which, however, only succeeded in carrying away the thunderbolt which was the standard flying on Indra's car. With the same breath, he buried his darts in the heart of Matali and on the bodies of his horses, and aimed a terrible flight of arrows against Rama himself. Rama was quite invisible to the eyes of the Devas, so innumerable were the arrows that Ravana aimed at him. The Devas wept saying, 'Alas! Rama is

[1] VI xxxvi 50.

conquered!' The Rakshasas shouted for joy, and the universe trembled.

> The God of fire his lustre lost and heat;
> The Sea unmoving stood without a wave;
> The sun his chariot stopped in heaven; the moon
> Moved not; and even rain-clouds were dried up
> I' th' sky.[1]

Even Vanara leaders and Lakshmana trembled for the fate of Rama. But Rama was not injured; he only showed his nonchalance by his leisureliness. At length, he surprised both friends and foes by the rapidity with which he broke up the screen of arrows which appeared to have all but destroyed him. And the Devas recovered from their despair. As the standard fell from Rama's car, *Garuda* himself flew and settled on the staff as the living standard of Rama.

Ravana then sent against Rama the *astra* called *Tamasa*, which came in the shape

> Of arrows tipped with fire and blood, of darts
> With face of Asuras and gods and spirits,
> And cobras of the crooked fangs. They came
> As darkness black, and eye-dazzling light, as rain
> And thunder, and a veritable shower
> Of iron hail.[2]

But when Rama sent the *astra* named of Shiva, the power of the *Tamasa* failed. Ravana then sent

> The Astra named the Asura which had
> In former days the name of gods destroyed,
> And maw of Yama surfeited with lives.
> It was the arm 'fore which the king of heav'n
> Had fled in terror.[3]

But the *Agni-astra*—the weapon named of fire—aimed by Rama burned it before it could reach him. After trying the weapon forged by *Maya* which also failed, broken by the *Gandharva-astra* of Rama, Ravana

1 VI xxxvi 80. 2 VI xxxvi 90, 92. 3 VI xxxvi 97.

> Now threw the mace on Ram with which in days
> Of yore great Daruka had felled the gods :
> (The four-faced god had forged it by his art ;
> The Asuras, fierce Hiranya and Madku,
> Had tamed their foes with its almighty force.) [1]

Everybody thought that Rama's end had come. The mace came with a force that made the very Meru Hill tremble, destroying all that crossed its way in space. But one dart from Rama's bow was able to break that divine mace into fragments.

Ravana now sent the *Maya-astra,* the weapon of illusion, against Rama. And behold, all the Rakshasas dead in previous battles appeared to have come back to life and to be advancing on Rama and the Vanara forces with terrific war-shouts. There was Indrajit and Atikaya and the other commanders of the Rakshasa armies up to the very reserve forces that fell only the previous day, all rushing with arms and shouting :

> 'Hast thou forsooth defeated us ? And dost
> Believe that we could die ? Thou'lt see our fight
> This day ! Advance, Advance !' [2]

The gods and *rishis* believed the illusion true and were thunderstruck to see alive the Rakshasas who had been destroyed by their defenders. Rama was also put out and asked Matali what he could do. Matali told him that it was illusion and would be destroyed the moment he sent a dart pronouncing the Supreme Name of himself. Rama, therefore, pronounced his own name and sent a dart presided over by the Spirit of Wisdom and behold, the *Maya* of Ravana was broken.

The triple lance of Shiva was then hurled by Ravana, which came flaming through the air, spreading a weird light over all things and terrifying the gods. The arrows that Rama aimed against it, all fell powerless to hurl it, and it came on and on, and nearer and nearer Rama. When even divine weapons could not prevail against it, Rama stood motionless. The Devas trembled to see Rama standing inactive, a target to the terrible weapon of Shiva hurled by the foe. Dharma itself was terror-struck. But as it struck his chest Rama pronounced the symbolic mantra of *Hum* and lo, the *Shula* of Shiva broke into fragments! Seeing the exhibition of this divine power of Rama, Ravana exclaimed :

1 VI xxxvi 105, 106. 2 VI xxxvi 115.

'Who can this Rama be? He is not Shiv,
Nor Vishnu, nor the Four-faced One divine.
As for austerities, he looks not strong
Enough to mortify his flesh. Is he,
Perchance, the Universal Cause, of whom
The Vedas speak?'[1]

But his valour checks him from considering further as to who he might be. Like Rustom of the *Shah Namah* he disdains, in spite of suspicious appearances, to inquire into the true character of his enemy.

He, therefore, formed his resolution saying,

'But be he who he may,
I will not swerve from war's straight path: I won't
Withdraw from my warrior's duty plain. I will
Yet conquer him. E'en should I fall by 'is darts,
My name for valour undismayed will last
For ever! let there be victory or death:
I turn not back!'[2]

So he fought with unabated fury. His *Nairriti-astra* came like millions of cobras spitting venom all over, but the *Garudastra* of Rama turned itself into eagles which bit the cobras to pieces and made the venom harmless. After many more *astras* had been aimed and parried, Ravana began to show signs of exhaustion, but Rama, who had not put forth half his strength up to now, was as fresh as ever, and now began to take the offensive. He aimed at one of the necks of Ravana a crescent-shaped arrow. It flew with a terrific force and cut and carried off a head of his and sunk it into the sea. But behold,

E'en as the virtuous soul that after death
Doth take its birth again in a better frame,
Ev'n so, upon the trunk another head
Arose, its fury unforgot: is there
Among endeavours yielding golden fruit
A higher one than *tapas*?[3]

The new head defied Rama in tones of thunder, while that which was thrown into the sea was also roaring no less loudly.

[1] VI xxxvi 135. [2] VI xxxvi 136. [3] VI xxxvi 152.

Filled with fresh anger against Rama for having shamed him by cutting off one of his heads, Ravana buried into Rama's chest a flight of fourteen of his sharpest arrows. But Rama did not mind his wounds and sent an arrow which cut off an arm of Ravana which fell down, but with its grip on the bow unloosened. Ravana took that fallen arm and dashed it against Rama, but it struck only Matali, who vomitted blood at the shock. And again he aimed a *tomara* against Matali, thinking to destroy him and disable Rama from using the car. But Rama's arrows broke it on its way and saved the life of his charioteer.

Ravana now hurled his lance, and mace, and battle-axe against the foe. Rama, however, broke or parried them, and aimed arrows after arrows against him, which entered his trunk and limbs and eyes. Ravana sank exhausted in his chariot. His charioteer saw the plight of his master and steered his car back towards the rear. Matali advised Rama to kill Ravana even as his car was retreating, but Rama with the true chivalry of the Indian warrior said,

> 'Do not the laws of war, O Matali,
> Forbid the taking of an enemy's life
> When he has thrown away his weapons of war
> And agitated flees for life? The fight
> Doth end today!'[1]

Before the car had retreated far, however, Ravana recovered from his swoon, but he did not see Rama in his front. He turned back, and found Rama standing in his place like a victorious hero. At once he turned furiously on his charioteer, and saying,

> 'Thou hast, O villain, turned my chariot back
> And made yon Rama mock my valour 'fore
> The very gods! Thou hast enjoyed my bounties,
> And yet, though I did put my trust in thee,
> Thou hast by turning back the car, made me
> Appear a coward. Think'st thou I'll spare thy life?'[2]

Ravana drew his sword. But the charioteer remonstrated with him saying, that he had fallen on his seat exhausted, and that if he had stayed longer he would have been killed with the darts of Rama. He concluded :

[1] VI xxxvi 175. [2] VI xxxvi 178.

'The charioteer must judge the condition
Of him who fights from on his car: when sinks
The hero powerless to continue
The fight, 'tis the duty of the charioteer
To save his master's life by wise retreat.'[1]

Ravana's anger cooled at these words. He therefore put back his sword into the scabbard and ordered his charioteer to retrace his steps and drive the car back to the front. He felt indeed that his end was come, but he would not yield in valour to Rama. On the contrary, he fought with the strength of despair. The bystanders thought that it was another and a stronger Ravana that was fighting now, and trembled. Such was his new fury.

But Rama's blood too was up, and he determined, finally, to put an end to the Rakshasa. He aimed an arrow at his bow which had been given by Brahma, and broke it to pieces in his hands. And as Ravana took another bow and showed all his usual skill, and varied his attack with lances and maces and spears and *kappanas,* Rama thought that *Brahmastra* alone could end him. So, parrying the enemy's shower of weapons, he took the *astra,* pronounced the appropriate spells, and sent it tearing against the chest of Ravana. It flew with a ferocious speed, illumining the very ends of the universe, and shaming even the Sun of the Final Day by its dazzling light. The Chakra of Vishnu, which had also, as the reader will remember, taken its place on Rama's car, now joined its force to that of the *Brahmastra*, and impregnated with this twofold force, Rama's arrow struck and entered the mighty chest of Ravana.

And Ravana fell mortally wounded!

The holy dart of Raghava did drink
His three crore years of mortal life, and all
The strength of his austerities; it quenched
The blessing Brahma had bestowed on him
That none should have the power to conquer him;
It did the might extinguish which had brought
The universe beneath his awful sway;
And piercing clean his chest, it drank the blood
And straightway flashed through th' air with lightning speed.

1 VI xxxvi 182.

Rejoicing in the grateful blessings breath'd
By Gods and Brahmans true, and followed close
By the rain of flowers that they did shower all through
Its path, the dart pursued its way to th' Sea
Of Milk ; it washed therein its bloody stains,
And turned, and flying over the waves that played
On the sea of Ravana's blood, it entered quick
And hid itself within the quiver of Ram,
Its eerie home. [1]

So ended the hero of a thousand battles, the most valiant hero excepting Rama that epic poetry has ever created or sung. Achilles and Hector, and even Arjuna and Bhima look like mere pigmies when placed beside this giant-king of Lanka. We do not speak only of the physical stature that the poet attributes to him. His passions and his power, his valour and his pride, his prowess and his authority are on the same gigantic scale as his vast physical proportions. Milton's Satan is grand indeed in his rebellious pride and ambition, in his power and the determination of his indomitable will. But all his achievements and valour are reserved only for heaven. On earth, he is not more than a wily old serpent. And compare Satan's end in Hell with Ravana's. Milton describes the end of Satan thus :

"His visage drawn he felt too sharp and spare ;
His arms clung to his ribs, his legs entwining
Each other, till supplanted down he fell
A monstrous serpent on his belly prone,
Reluctant, but in vain . . . .
. . . . He would have spoke,
But hiss for hiss returned with forked tongue
To forked tongue."

How different is the end of Ravana ! His valour shines to the very last, and the crescendo is completed in his short but sublime address to the charioteer. And even after he has fallen the poet would say,

. . . . but the hero's face
Even at that awful moment wore a look
Of majesty, surpassing far the splendour
Even of days when saints and Rishis had
To flee for safety from his oppressive rule. [2]

1 VI xxxvi 198, 199. 2 VI xxxvi 201.

CHAPTER XIV

BHARATA

We have, so far, studied all the main characters excepting Sita that are directly connected with the destruction of Ravana, which is the one action of our epic. We have also seen and discussed Kamban's delineation of the heroes of two of his grandest episodes, namely Vali and Hiranyakashipu. Exigencies of space prevent us from studying the other characters of the story, interesting as they are, except in the manner that we have done hitherto, namely by bringing in their traits and doings as much as possible in the studies of our main characters. We shall close our examination of the characters of the *Ramayana* by discussing Bharata and Sita in this chapter and the next.

Bharata is, as well as is not, intimately connected with the story of the epic. He is connected intimately with our story in that his love for Rama gives rise to some of the most touching episodes in the epic, and also, chiefly, in that it is for his sake that Kaikeyi forces Dasharatha to send Rama to the forest. He is not intimately connected with the story in that he is not associated with Rama in the destruction of Ravana and his forces. But the reader that knows not Bharata misses more than half the beauty of the *Ramayana,* and knows not one of the most just and tender-hearted and most touching characters known to story or history.

Bharata, like Lakshmana, does not appear much in the *Balakanda.* There we only hear that he loves Rama with a tender love, and that he marries one of the daughters of Janaka's brother. It is in the Second Book of the *Ramayana* that we see the whole evolution of his character, while the final touch is reserved for the end of the story in the Book of Battles.

It is the cruel conduct of his mother, Kaikeyi, that brings Bharata to prominence in the story, and it is the remembrance of that same cruelty that ever after presses heavily upon his tender and noble heart. Hence, the reader must know something more than what we have given in the second chapter about Kaikeyi and her heartless behaviour towards Dasharatha and Rama.

Kaikeyi was not always cruel. In fact, she loved Rama

very ostentatiously, if not deeply. She was the wife to whom Dasharatha was most attached. She, therefore, naturally and as a matter of habit, tended and nursed the child on whom was set the whole soul of her lord. The beauty and noble qualities of Rama must have made Kaikeyi take pride in loving, which was the only way of owning, such a child. Rama on his part loved her deeply. He never made any difference between his own mother Kausalya and her.

So when Manthara, her favourite maid, tried to poison her mind against the coronation of Rama, Kaikeyi reprimanded her and even grew indignant.

When Manthara, filled with jealousy against Rama's and the world's happiness, ran to announce to Kaikeyi the sudden news of Rama's impending coronation and to rouse her to oppose it, Kaikeyi was half-asleep. So she pressed her feet to rouse her from her drowsiness, and when Kaikeyi did not even then rise from her bed, she exclaimed :

> 'Ev'n as the moon will not abate her light
> Effulgent, up to the very moment when
> The dragon stealeth over to eclipse
> Her face, thou dost, O lovely mistress mine,
> Slumber secure e'en when disaster hangs
> Heavy upon thy head!'[1]

Kaikeyi heard the words of Manthara and replied,

> ' . . . . When all my brave and worthy sons
> Are hale in body and swerve not from the path
> Of righteousness, can e'er disaster come
> On me? They say, that joy ineffable
> Belongs to them who're blessed with children whom
> The world can never enough commend: can harm,
> O Manthara, approach me ev'r, who have
> Good Rama for a son?'[2]

Seeing her wanderings in the realms of impartial love, Manthara tried to awaken in her the jealousy natural to a woman for her co-wife, and partly succeeded in her attempt. For, when she shed crocodile tears saying,

[1] II ii 45. [2] II ii 47.

'Woe unto thee! thy days of joy are o'er:
For, deep Kausalya has ascended now
To the topmost rung of fortune's ladder.'[1]

Kaikeyi replied with hauteur,

'If the King of kings is still my lord, and if
Bharat of unsurpassed fame is yet
My son, wherein is she, Kausalya, better
Than me?'[2]

Pleased with the effect of her first assault, and believing that she had broken the defences of her mistress's heart sufficiently well, in order to ensure a victory by a simple walk-over, Manthara aimed a dart just tipped with a little venom. She said,

'Thou askest wherein is Kausalya better:
Only there is a young man who has shamed
Manhood and earned the laughter of the wise
By bending 'gainst a woman—Tadaka—
His well-carved bow. Tomorrow he is to be
As king of Ayodh crowned!'[3]

But the dart fell blunted, for,

. . . . When she announced
The happy news, Kaikeyi's heart was glad
Ev'n as Kausalya's motherly heart: she felt
No jealousy within her heart; may't be
Because sweet Rama's father lived within
The palace of her heart? A very sea
Of joy arose within her soul, a light
As of the full-orbed moon shone on her face;

1 II ii 48.

2 II ii 49. In consonance with the noble sentiment Kaikeyi utters in the earlier poem, where she exclaims, 'can harm, O Manthara, approach me ev'r, who have good Rama for a son?' this poem is rendered by some commentators as follows:

'If the King of kings is still her lord, and son,
Bharat of unsurpassed fame is her's,
Than this, what greater fortune here is yet
For her to reach?'

Thus, the peace and unity which prevails among the queens, and which Manthara is now to destroy, is painted vividly in the surrender to Kausalya of the king whose favourite is Kaikeyi and of her own Bharata too. (P)

3 II ii 50.

And she took out a garland made of gems,
The brightest of their kind, and threw it round
Manthara's neck.[1]

Manthara had not negotiated for this—to her mind—unnatural joy. She had thought that the announcement of Rama's coronation coupled with a slight reference to Kausalya as the person who would most profit by it would be sufficient to wake up the dormant feelings of rivalry in the heart of Kaikeyi. But instead of burning with jealousy that the son of another wife was crowned while her own son was away at his grandfather's home, here was Kaikeyi so overjoyed at the news that she presented a garland of gems herself to Manthara for bringing the tidings. So she thought that she should set about to lay siege to her heart in a more methodical manner, and accordingly put her plan into execution. She, therefore, wept and moaned, and wailed, and being a favourite maid, frowned at and even abused her loudly and dashed the garland on the ground. And then, eying her in wrath, she burst forth in these words :

'O fool, thou may'st if thou desire, expose
Thyself along with Bharata, thy child,
To sufferings of every kind ; but I
Cannot endure to be the slave of those
That serve Kausalya, thy cunning co-wife proud.
If Ram is crowned, thy son will have to sit
As a common man upon the floor, the while
His brother with Sita seats himself upon
Th' Imperial throne ; how comes thy heart to be
In ecstasies o'er this impending fate !
Kausalya has not been unmindful, sure,
Of her interest and lo, her son will wear
The crown imperial. Poor Bharata !
He is not even dead, he lives ! How can
He bear the sight ? For the sin of being born
Thy child, alas, his royal birth has gone
In vain ! If Rama and his Lakshmana
Alone will share the glories of the crown,
'T were better far, for Bharata and his brother
T' exile themselves to forests dark than dwell

1 II ii 52.

In fair Ayodh. Our luckless Bharata's name,
If not destined to shine in the proud list
Of monarchs of the earth, is it not better
If he is dead? I could not then divine,
But now I see too clearly, why the king
Did send thy son by long and weary roads
To far off Kekay. Alas, unfortunate child!
My luckless Bharata! Thy father is turned
Thy foe, for he is partial to thy brother;
And now thy mother too is turned 'gainst thee!
What will become of thee? Of what avail
To thee are now thy valour, learning, youth,
Thy beauty, and thy skill in war, and all
Thy noble traits? They are like nectar fallen
Upon the grass: they are a sheer waste . . . .

'A daughter of a glorious line of kings
Thou grew'st in palaces and wedded art
To the descendant of far-famed line
Of emperors, thyself a queen from head
To foot: and yet thou plungest in a sea
Of misery despite the warnings wise
Of a friend. Is there a greater fool than thee?'[1]

Kaikeyi's affection for Rama and her sense of right were too strong to yield to this sapping and mining operation of Manthara, elaborate as it was. So she replied to Manthara with indignation flashing in her eyes, thus:

'The righteous kings of Surya's holy race,
O evil one, do never break the word
Even to save their life: and ev'n as 'mong
The crested peacocks,[2] 'tis the eldest son

[1] II ii 54-62.

[2] Manu is the first king of the Solar-race to which Rama belonged. It is a common belief among Indian poets that the first born chick of peahens, and it alone, is born with a crest on the head to mark it off from the rest of the young chickens. Kaikeyi says that Rama alone, as the first-born of Dasharatha is fit to succeed his father on the throne of Ayodhya.

[The above note of Aiyar follows the common interpretation by commentators who had only known books, and had not known Nature as knew the poet of the *Thanikai Puranam*, who made the first reference to this trait of the peacocks which has come down to us.

We now know that it was not merely to a common *belief* that Kamban was referring to, but it was a fact in Nature. We are indebted,

That's marked as heir in Manu's royal house.
What did thy tongue suggest, degraded wretch?
Thou art no friend to me nor to my son,
Nor, if we look to Dharma, to thyself!
To evil drawn by ill deeds done by thee
I' th' past, thou speakest thoughtless one, whate'er
Thy ill-regulated, low-born mind suggests!
If all that're born must die, and what is left
On earth by men as gain or lost for ev'r
Is only glory unsullied, then whate'er
Is lost—whe'r life, or justice, or e'en right
And holy vows and works—can we give up
Traditions that descend from ancient Sire
To son? If others should suspect what passed
Between us two—but be thou gone from 'fore
My face! Bless thou thy stars, O sinful wretch,
That I refrain from cutting thy tongue.
Avaunt, thou fool, and open not thy lips.'[1]

In spite of these harsh words, Manthara did not own defeat. On the contrary, she determined to carry by storm what would not yield to the more feeble operation of sapping and mining. So, 'like the poison that would not abate in virulance even after incantations are pronounced, but continues to attack the system,' she did not cease her attempt. She fell at Kaikeyi's feet, and

for this information to the Poet-laureate of Madras, Shri V. Ramalingam Pillai,—popularly known as the Namakkal Kavingar (poet of Namakkal)—whose article on this simile appears in the October 1949 issue of the *Kalai-Magal*, Madras. He says:

'It was in 1915 that I saw an article by an eminent American Ornithologist in the *Scientific American*. He had bred peacocks in captivity, and had marked with rings the chicks of one brood in the order of their hatching out of the eggs. Later, he continued to note their life day to day, and one of his observations was that the peahen always goes about with all its family along with it, and that, whenever an occasion arose for the peacocks to spread their tails and dance about, the order of precedence of fanning out the wings was invariably in the order of their emergence from the eggs.'

The ancient Tamil poets, who had lived close to Nature, had noted this interesting phenomenon ages ago, and had effectively used it in poetry.

We would be failing in our duty if we did not add that the *Namakkal Kavingar*, in his youth, used to pose these verses to Tamil scholars and crow over their discomfiture, but once he met his match in a very old man in a remote township who pricked our poet-laureate's bubble with a bland statement of this life-habit of the peacock. (P)]

[1] II ii 64-67.

saying, 'O my love, I won't refrain from telling thee what is for thine own good,' she pressed her assault on the heart of her mistress in the following words :

'If th' eldest of thy race alone can sit
Upon the throne as thou declarest, I ask
O princess mine, how can the sea-hued Ram
Be crowned while the King of kings is yet alive ?
If he the younger did consent to wear
The crown, canst say that tradition stops thy son
Alone from claiming what is but his right ?
And think of this : e'en those whose heart is filled
With righteous thoughts and ruth do alter when
Unrivalled power and wealth do come to them.
So, though thy foes may never injure thee
And thine by open force, they will attempt,
I'm sure, to break thy heart with mean affronts.
If her son rules as king, Kausalya's heart
Would be inflated, her ambitious mind
Would never e'en with owning the earth entire
Be satisfied. What will be left for thee
But what she gives to thee of her own grace ?
When thou wilt be in gruesome poverty
Immersed, if people come to thee for help,
Wouldst thou beg of her the wherewithal to do
Thy daily charities ? Or wouldst thou bend down
Thine eyes in shame ? Or wouldst thou eat thy heart
In grief ? Or wouldst thou close thy door against
Their face ? Thou art with madness seized, my love :
For, tell me, if thy father or his kin
Should come t' Ayodh to shelter seek with thee
From cruel foes, desirest thou they should
Be balked of all their hopes, and see instead
With hungering eyes thy co-wife's opulence ?
And think : the fear of thy lord alone
Prevents king Janaka from falling on
Thy father's realms ; if Ram ascends the throne
Of Oudh, would the father of his wife, the king
Of Mithila withhold his greedy hands
From Kekaya ? And ev'n if he forbears,
Are there not foes on foes conspiring 'gainst
Thy father ? If they fall on him, think'st thou

That Ram would give him help? And helpless, how
Can he against his numerous enemies hold?
Alas, thy kindred will be ruined, and thou
Thyself wilt sink in a sea of misery?
What more? Thou hast by thy neglect brought ruin
Upon thy son, for, be thou sure, if Ram
Is crowned, it will be he alone and his
Beloved Lakshmana that will enjoy
The sovereign power: think'st thou that others will have
A share?'[1]

When Manthara finished, she had conquered. For Kaikeyi altered at once, and looking sweetly on her said, 'O great is thy love for me and my son; now advise me, dear, as to how I can obtain the crown for Bharata.'

Manthara now reminded her that Dasharatha had in grateful recognition of her services as charioteer in olden times, promised to grant her any two requests,—whatever they might be—that she might at any time make to him, and that she should now demand the banishment of Rama and the coronation of Bharata as her two boons. Kaikeyi embraced her heartily for this timely advice and said,

'Thou hast now given the sea-girt earth entire
To my son Bharata: 'tis thou that art
Henceforth the mother of the King to be,
Not I! Well hast thou said: My Bharat shall
Be crowned today and Ram forthwith exiled
To the forests: if my lord would not consent
To this, I'll take my life at his very feet!'[2]

So she removed her ornaments and flowers, removed the tilaka[3] on her forehead, and laid herself on the ground awaiting the coming of Dasharatha. When he saw her in that condition, he swore in the name of Rama himself that he would do her pleasure if she would only mention it. She now reminded him of the old promise made before the gods and asked that he should grant her the two requests that she would presently ask of him. Ignorant of her guile, he said, 'Name them immediately so that I may grant them at once and take the weight off my mind.' But when she named her heartless requests, he fell like an

[1] II ii 67-76. [2] II ii 83, 84.
[3] Vermilion mark, a sign of married state.

elephant bitten by a snake. He sobbed and moaned; his lips were parched up; he swooned. But her heart remained as before—she did not relent. At length, he came to, and asked her 'Art thou turned mad or art thou tutored by designing persons? Speak!' But she coolly answered, 'Neither am I mad, nor am I tutored by evil persons; if thou grant my two requests I shall accept them; if thou refuse, I shall take my life here at thy feet to thy eternal dishonour.' These words tortured him to the quick and even made him curse Dharma and Truth. After thinking of a hundred things—even putting her to the sword—he, at length, fell at her feet and appealed to her better nature. He said,

> 'Thy son will not accept the throne, and even if he should accept, my subjects would oppose the idea. Do not, therefore, Kaikeyi, run after disgrace, but earn eternal glory by withdrawing your requests. Neither gods nor man will approve of this. With whose good-will, then, canst thou rule the earth? Rama is not greedy—he himself consented to the coronation only in response to my insistent request—and he will certainly apportion a part of my vast territory to thy son.'[1]

Seeing that she showed no signs of withdrawing her demand, he continued:

> 'Even if thou demand my eyes, I would yield them to thee; should thou ask for my life, even now it is thine. And, O woman, O fair one of Kekaya's generous race, if thou desire, take thou the crown, but insist not on thy other prayer. My word once given, I will never break it; but even a demon would relent if anybody begs of it as I beg of thee! So torture me not by a refusal, O Kaikeyi!'[2]

But she did not yield. 'Thou thyself has promised', she said, 'to grant me my requests, and I insist on them. If, now, thou hesitate, who else is there in the world to stand for truth?' Dasharatha pleaded more pitifully. He said:

> 'Let thy son reign, and thou thyself may'st rule
> The earth with him. I grant thee this, and I
> Shall not go back upon my word. I pray
> But this, insist not that my son who is
> Mine eye, my life, the beloved of all the world,
> Should leave this land. My heart-strings break to see

[1] II iii 26, 27. [2] II iii 28, 29.

That Truth itself doth tear me by the roots.
If he whose hands are like the lotus fair,
Should go from me, O noble one, my life
Will ebb away. I pray thee save my life!'[1]

But even these piteous words did not move her. Her heart was made of wood. Neither did she care for honour. She therefore heartlessly replied:

'When thou dost seek to go back on thy word,
O warrior-king, canst call it righteousness?
Is it not braving sin?'[2]

Dasharatha now lost all hopes of touching her heart, and rolled on the ground like a rock struck by the thunderbolt. He could not see a shore to the sea of grief in which he was getting drowned, and bewailed his fate and cursed Kaikeyi's hardness of heart. These words only made her more cruel, and she threatened him that if he would not grant her requests immediately she would die by her own hand at his feet. 'Once upon a time,' she concluded, 'a king cut his very body to pieces in order to honour his pledged word. Of what use are thy regrets now, after having promised once to grant my desire?'

When she stabbed him thus, without the slightest compunction, with her tongue, he gave up every hope, and crying out,

'I grant thee even this request; let Ram
To the jungles be exiled, I shall to heaven
Depart, and swim ye—Bharata and thou—
Dishonour's perennial stream for ev'r and ev'r.'[3]

he fell into a swoon. So Kaikeyi had her heart's desire fulfilled and went to sleep the sleep of the just, unmindful of the suffering and the torture of her husband.

When morning dawned, the princes and people, ignorant of what had happened the previous night, assembled in the coronation hall with expectant heart to witness the coronation of their beloved prince. Not seeing the King, Vashistha sent Sumantra to Kaikeyi's palace to ask the King to come to the hall. But Kaikeyi, on her part, ordered Sumantra to bring Rama

[1] II iii 32, 33. [2] II iii 34. [3] II iii 44.

to her. Sumantra went with a joyous heart and brought Rama from his home to the palace of Kaikeyi. Says the poet:

Kaikeyi thought that Dash'rath would not speak
The cruel words himself, and so, when Ram
Entered her audience hall, 'fore him who looked
On her as mother she came alone, e'en as
The spirit of Death! His heart did leap for joy
At sight of her as the calf when it sees
The mother-cow. He fell prostrate at her feet
And stood in silence respectful. But she
Hardened her iron-heart, more hard than heart
Of Death himself, and said, 'there is a thing
I have to tell thee, son, and if thou ask
Whether thy father sanctioned it, I do
Assure thee, I've the sanction of the king
To tell it thee.' To which Ram thus replied,
'If father deigns to give me a command,
And thou communicat'st the same to me,
I look on myself as the happiest son
On earth—is there a happier son than me?
Could all my holy endeavours give to me
A better blessing than to hear and
Obey such parents as you are. And thou
Thyself art father as well as mother to me.
I 'wait his dear commands: speak them to me.'[1]

It was to such a son and such a man that Kaikeyi spoke those cruel words which we have translated elsewhere.[2]

So Rama went away with Lakshmana and Sita to the forests while Dasharatha died with the name of Rama upon his lips. Vashistha sent messengers to Kekaya to bring Bharata, but he instructed them not to inform Bharata of the death of Dasharatha or of the exile of Shri Rama. The messengers reached Kekaya in due course, and when they gave Bharata the note which said that he must immediately start for Ayodhya,

He was in ecstasies, his hair did stand
On end, for yearned his loving heart to see
His brother and clasp his feet in loving worship.[3]

[1] II iii 103-106. [2] *See* page 9. [3] II ix 7.

He, therefore, started immediately with his brother and retinue and hurried on to Ayodhya. As he entered the limits of his own country, however, he was shocked at the strange sight that greeted his eyes. No plough was seen plying on the fields. No garlands were seen on the necks of the men. The fields were not watered. Lakshmi herself seemed to have left the earth. There was no smile on the faces of the passers-by. No music was heard in the streets. The theatres and dancing-halls were deserted. Women's hair was unadorned with flowers. The whole country looked like a body from which the soul had fled away.

Bharata's heart was pained beyond description. He thought some great evil must have happened at home, and sighed, and hurried on with redoubled pace. As he entered the city, the sights were still more heart-rending. He saw not the flags flying that used to look as if shading the whole city from the heat of the sun. He heard not the sound of the drum which used to sound every day as if inviting the needy to come and receive the bounty of the emperor. He saw not the Brahmanas leaving the palaces with presents of cows and horses and elephants and gold. No musicians played on their *Vina*. No chariots or palanquins plied on the streets. No horses or elephants carried men and women, and the streets looked deserted even as a river dried up.

He entered the palace of his father but saw him nowhere. While he was still looking for him (and none would speak to him, as all suspected him to be in conspiracy with his mother) messengers came to him from his mother desiring his presence before her. He went to her and prostrated at her feet, when she, selfish woman that she was, asked whether her father and mother and sisters were well. He said that they were all well and in the same breath asked her where his father was. When she replied that he had died, he fell down like a *sal* tree struck by the thunderbolt. He slowly recovered and lamented for his father's death in pathetic words. The poet indicates his attitude towards Rama in the following words that he puts in his mouth in the midst of his lamentation :

> 'Didst grieve that Rama's hand was bare, and didst
> Thou leave this earth desiring thy sceptre,
> Which had never left thy hands, should now adorn
> The hand of the blessed one. But, sooth, if thou
> Hadst loved the son that thy austerities
> Did bless thee with, wouldst thou have left him thus ?

> Nor alas, art thou given to see with thine eyes
> The Coronation of thy Ram!'[1]

Shatrughna consoled Bharata, and when he had recovered from the first paroxysm of grief, he said,

> 'As Ram alone is father, mother, and lord
> To me, unless I bow my head at his feet
> My heart cannot recover from this shock.'[2]

It is Valmiki that has built up this situation with great artistic skill and Kamban adopts his arrangements of this scene without much alteration. But the student of Valmiki will see that, as an artist of equally rich imagination, Kamban does not translate Valmiki even here but carries on the conversation in his own way, while with his greater dramatic skill he avoids the slowness of Valmiki and makes the scene unroll itself with greater rapidity. We shall see how Kamban handles the situation.

When Kaikeyi heard the words of Bharata that we have given above, she coolly replied and without any comment, that Rama had gone away to the wilderness with his brother and Sita. At these words Bharata felt as if he had swallowed living fire, and asked between many a sob and sigh:

> 'Can fate bring forth a greater ill? And what more ill news are there for me to hear? Is it as punishment for any ill deed done by him that Rama has been sent to the forests? Or is it the wrath of the gods or Fate that has sent him in exile? If Rama had done an ill deed, men would have looked on it as they would have on any deed done by their mother herself—who then could have punished him? Oh, tell me, is it after father's death that he left or before?'[3]

After some more filigree work, Kamban makes Kaikeyi at last come out with the truth. She said:

> 'I made thy father grant me two of my wishes, by one of which I sent away Rama to the wilds, and by the other I got the throne for thee. Thy father could not bear this and therefore it is he died.'

As soon as he had heard these words, his hands that were joined in reverence flew to close his ears against any further

[1] II ix 55, 56. [2] II ix 58. [3] II ix 60-62.

blasphemy. His brows met together in a terrific frown. His eyes became blood-red and his cheeks trembled; his body was like a mass of fire; he bit his lips and struck the ground to the terror of the very thunderbolt. As he strode the hall—unable to stand still—the earth with Meru Hill tottered even like a boat tossed by storms in the open sea. The Devas and the *Asuras* trembled at his passion, and how many died not with sheer fright! The mammoths holding up the earth quaked with fear and the God of Death shut his eyes. Continues the poet:

> The lion-like Bharata boiling with wrath
> Hesitated not to strike because she was
> His mother: he feared the anger of Ram, and so
> It is, he left Kaikey unharmed. But he
> His wrath did not conceal and thus burst forth:
> 'I hear thee say that through thy plot my father
> Is dead and my brother gone to the wilderness:
> And if I have not plucked thy sinful tongue
> By the roots till now, doth it not mean that I
> Have in my greed begun to rule the earth?
> Thou livest yet; and still my spell-bound hand
> Leapeth not forth to finish thee! Did not
> I fear that Ram my master would resent
> The deed, shall even the name of mother stay
> My arm from slaying thee?'[1]

Bharata's filial affection, tenderness, sweetness, joy in life, all have now gone to the winds. After this revelation of Kaikeyi he cannot look at the world except in terms of her double guilt. And he cannot forget that he is the son of Kaikeyi and that it is for his sake that she executed her cruel plot. He begins to be obsessed with the idea that none would believe that he had no hand in his mother's conspiracy, and the idea oppresses his heart every minute with an increasing intensity. So self-reproach and self-condemnation become his normal state of mind. And Kamban paints this state of mind in all its aspects with the same victorious ease with which he paints other feelings. The following are extracts from the continuation of Bharata's address to Kaikeyi:

'We have a king who gives up his life to keep his word; we have a hero who gives up the crown in obedience to

[1] II ix 70, 71, 74.

cruel words; and, if there is a Bharata to wear the crown in his place, will not the cycle of the righteous be complete?

'Can there be a greater renown to me than to make posterity point out to me as having destroyed the family tradition, helped by the plot of his mother and brought dishonour upon the race?

'Thy heart is not heavy though thou hast killed thy lord! Ah, devil in human shape, how thy life persists! Thou will not even now end thyself! Thou gavest me the milk of thy breasts when I was a child, and now thou hast brought on me eternal disgrace. What more are the gifts that thou art going to bestow on me, mother?

'With thy tongue hast thou slain a king who would never utter an untruth, and acquired dishonour that will never end, and thou desirest to enjoy sovereignty and power for ever. Fie on thee that even when thou sawest the very cows and calves follow him to the forest, thou didst not find it in thy heart to put an end to thy life!

. . . .

'Ah! Ram believes that I am privy to my mother's conspiracy, for, otherwise, knowing that father would die for not seeing him, would he not have returned at least to save his life? Has he not left for the forest wilds verily in the belief that I would not hesitate to sit on the throne?

. . . .

'And yet I live! Will not the world point out to me as the wretch who consents to eat sweet white rice in plates while my elder brother is eating leaves in cups, themselves made of those very leaves?

'The good king died the very instant he heard the news that Ram had left for the forest, while I kill not the woman who is cruel as very poison, nor will I die. Am I not indeed, rich in dishonour? And yet I weep as if I have a loving heart!'[1]

And then, after telling his mother that there was nothing for her now but to take her life and wipe out the dishonour that she had brought on herself, Bharata went to Kausalya, and clasping her feet wept for long.

'Where is my father, he cried, and where my brother? Came I to Ayodhya only to see this misery? Show me a balm

[1] II ix 73, 74, 76, 77, 79, 81, 82.

to my bleeding heart, O mother! The race whose glory was brighter than the sun has now become blackened by the birth of Bharata.'[1]

When Kausalya saw his rending grief, her natural anger disappeared and she felt that he was perfectly innocent and that he would not assume the crown. And she said:

'Ah! child, perhaps thou knewest not the plot
That Kekay's princess planned.'[2]

Here we should remark that, by stopping short with these words, Kamban makes Kausalya more dignified in character than Valmiki does with the taunting speech he puts into her mouth. At the same time, by making Bharata eat his own heart and protest his innocence by many a terrible oath the moment he heard even these words, Kamban makes his Bharata also seem more sensitive than the same hero in Valmiki.

Tortured by the words, though there was no more than the merest shadow of suspicion in them, Bharata took a terrible oath which is given in twenty stanzas, but from which we shall give only a few sentences. He said:

'If I had known the evil planned by that evil one, may I fall into the hell reserved for men that show not mercy, for those who endeavour to destroy charities, for those who corrupt the wife of another man, and for those who destroy life in wanton cruelty!

May I suffer the torments reserved for those who do harm to the holy ones who have renounced everything and do *tapas*, for those who flee from before their enemies in war, and for those who rob the poor!

May I be roasted in hell even as he who fills his maw while his mother suffers from hunger in dire indigence, as the follower who flees from his master when he is attacked by foes, as he who betrays to his foes the man who has taken refuge with him!

May I suffer the punishments inflicted in hell on the false witness, on him who is afraid of war, on him who eats away trust property, on him who draws all the milk without leaving enough for the calf, on the man who is ungrateful to his benefactor, on the man who would not defend women who are

[1] II ix 90, 93.

[2] II ix 96.

assaulted in his presence, and on him who eats when his neighbour is hungry!

May I writhe in hell as he who runs away from the battle-field fearing for his life, and as the king who robs the charitable foundations of his realms!

If I had desired the crown that Rama was to have worn, may I throw away my skill with the bow and the sword, and may I lose my valour, and for the sake of preserving the worthless body, may I live, a beggar in the place given to me by my enemies!

May I place my sword at the feet of my enemies and surrender my honour to them to be mocked at by women! May I lose the independence of my country and live a chained prisoner in the sight of my enemies!'[1]

When Bharata was taking the oath,
Kausalya felt as if she saw her Ram
Himself returned from his exile cruel. Her heart
Did fill with joy and new-returned love.[2]

She embraced him heartily and then sobbed with grief for the suspicions that she herself had entertained against him, though only for a very short time. And then she said to him—unable to contain her admiration of his nobility—

'O prince of princes, O my Bharata!
Of all the kings that have adorned thy House
From times beyond our memory, whom can
I name along with thee for purity
Of heart?'[3]

And the more she thought of his crystal purity and of the unjust suspicion that had come on him, the more deeply she grieved and the more freely flowed her tears. While both were mingling their tears thus, the family priest Vashistha came and after condolences asked him to look to the performance of the obsequies of his father. So the enbalmed body of Dasharatha was taken to the burning ground and placed on the funeral pyre. But when after the *mantras* were pronounced, Bharata rose to light the fire, Vashistha interposed and said :

1 II ix 98-117. 2 II ix 118. 3 II ix 120.

'Alas, my Bharata, thou may'st not light
The funeral fire nor join in the rites :
For Dasharath has repudiated thee
Also in the anguish of his heart, before
His death.'[1]

These words went like a cruel poisoned dart into the already tortured heart of Bharata, and he fell down like a cobra struck by the thunderbolt and thus lamented his fate :

'Of all the princes of my race who can
Compare with me ? I am unfit to perform
My father's funeral rites ; is it to seat
Myself upon the vacant throne alone
That I am born ? . . . . Alas, I am become
. . . .
The solitary sapless, fleshless nut
Amidst the fruitful bunch luxurious
Growing on the palm tree called the Solar-race.
Ah, how my mother has emblazed my name
I' the book of fame !'[2]

The funeral rites were performed by Shatrughna, Bharata only looking on with many a sigh and with a tortured heart. After everything was over Vashistha called the General Council of Princes and the People, and these called on Bharata to assume the crown. But,

When he heard the Rishi's words, he trembled
E'en more than men to whom the poison cup
Is offered ; tears flowed down his cheeks ; his tongue
Was parched ; his eyes began to roll ; his heart
Melted ev'n as a woman's heart. And then
Checking the feelings of his heart he spoke
Thus to the assembled elders : 'when 'tis not
Against the Ancient Dharm for righteous men
T' invite me to assume the crown, when lives
My elder brother who peerless stands in all
The worlds, who can my mother charge with guilt ?
Has the Age of the Kali dawned, O men of rede,

[1] II ix 132. [2] II ix 136, 138.

That ye approve my mother's cruel plot ?
From Brahma downwards, on the ancient earth
Can ye point out to me a prince who wore
The crown when th' elder brother was yet alive ?
Ev'n if it should be Dharm, I cannot bear
The burden of this crown ! Bring him therefore
From exile and crown him as king of Oudh.
If he refuse I'll go and live with him
The hermit's life austere of holy calm.
If ye invite me 'gain to wear the crown
I am resolved to take my life ; ye have
My mind.' [1]

These words of Bharata created a thrill of admiration in the hearts of the councillors. They said :

'Even Ram agreed to wear the crown while lived
The emperor, but thou, O grand-souled hero,
Deny'st thyself this vast entrancing earth
And sovereign power : where is thy peer among
The princes of the world ? Need'st thou a throne
T' emblaze thy name upon the hearts of men ?
Or need'st ostentatious charities
Or sacrifices grand to earn a name
'Mong men ? E'en when the fourteen worlds dissolve
In air, thy fame can never die !' [2]

So ended the council, and at the desire of Bharata all Ayodhya started to the forest to meet Rama and persuade him to come back and take the crown. The army marched in front as guard and the whole population walked or rode behind. After marching a few days, Bharata and the army reached the banks of the Ganga. Guha, who was the king of the forest folk thereabouts, saw the army from a distance and imagined that Bharata was come to capture and kill Rama, his friend. So, with his chest and arm swelling with joy at the expectation of battle, he called out his men and told them his thoughts in these words :

'Arrived in force here is the prince who prevented the coronation of the friend of my heart, the dark-coloured Rama, and usurped the throne for himself. But thinks he that my

[1] II x 13-18.

[2] II x 19, 20.

arrows cannot fly like fire-vomiting rocks? And if he escapes alive from before me, would not the world regard me as a worthless cur?

'Shall they cross today the deep waters of the Ganga, and are we bowmen afraid of the army because it is strengthened by elephant divisions? And shall we treat it as an empty breath—the declaration of lasting friendship made by Rama with us? And will not the world mock at me saying that the wretched hunter did not at least give his life for the sake of his friend?

'He recks not that Rama is his elder brother. Nor does he fear that there is a younger by his side, fierce and strong as a tiger. If he minds them not, how is it he despises even me? Is it not after passing me that he can attack Rama? Or is it that the arrows of hunters cannot pierce the hearts of Kshatriyas?

'Will kings never have any sense of sin or dishonour or disgrace? Will they be callous to the feelings of love and hate? Be that as it may, is it not after slaying me that they can fall upon the friend of my heart?'

'Is it not after crossing the Ganga that they can display the pride of their elephant and horse divisions? And ye fierce hunters, have ye not the power to destroy the beasts? And at the worst, is it not better to die before our Lord Shri Ram?

'Will ye not destroy the bannered host in front, and have it said that ye hunters restored sovereign power to the justest of princes? My Lord gave away to them a kingdom, and behold these cruel brothers grudge even the jungle land to him?'[1]

Frowning at Bharata in these and similar words, Guha stood on the southern bank of the river making his dispositions for the fight. Bharata, Shatrughna and the charioteer Sumantra walked to the northern bank of the river, and as he recognised Guha, Sumantra pointed him out to Bharata as the dear friend of Rama.

When Bharata heard that he was Rama's friend,
His holy heart was filled with joy, and saying,
'If he is a friend beloved of Ram, I will

[1] II xi 14-17, 19, 22.

Not wait for him t' advance but myself go
And meet him over there,' with quicker steps
He walked towards the water's edge.[1]

Guha could not distinguish the face and attire of Bharata.

He saw his form with tree-bark clothed and soiled
With neglected dust : he saw his smile-less face
E'en as the moon with all her glory shed :
He saw his anguished look that made e'en stones
With pity melt : and he astounded stood !
The banded bow dropped from his hand and sobbing
He thus expressed his awe-filled mind : 'Yon Prince
Resembles full my master Ram, while he
That's by him looks like Lakshman fair ; besides,
He wears the hermits' weeds ; and there appears
No end to the anguish of his heart : he joins
His hands in worship and looks reverent towards
The south. Can ev'r a brother of Rama swerve
From righteous ways ? '[2]

Guha told his chiefs that Bharata did not appear to have come with hostile intent and that he would cross over and ascertain the truth for himself. At the same time, however, asking them to guard the bank carefully, he went over in a boat to the other bank. On landing, he fell at the feet of Bharata who did him a similar honour and embraced him even more tenderly than if he had been his father. After all these salutations were over, Guha asked him what was the purport of his leaving Ayodhya and coming southward.[3] Bharata replied :

'My father who had ruled the worlds without
A single flaw has set at nought for once

1 II xi 27. 2 II xi 29, 30.

3 The student of Valmiki will see how much more delicate is Kamban's Guha, when compared to Valmiki's Guha, who tells Bharata to his face,

'But this thy host so wide disposed
Wakes in my heart one doubt and dread
Lest threatening Rama good and great,
Ill thoughts thy journey stimulate.'

It would be worthwhile to compare this whole episode of Guha as treated by Kamban at every step with Valmiki's treatment of the same. Valmiki has worked wonders in this episode but even the most partial admirer of Valmiki will have to admit that the touches that Kamban has added to it make it more entrancing, more grand. Unfortunately space forbids us to pursue the comparison here any further.

The traditions of our ancient line: I come
To call our Rama home and set them right.'[1]

Bharata's words drew sobs from the manly heart of Guha. Again he fell prostrate on the ground and clasping the lotus-like feet of Bharata, he addressed him these never-to-be-forgotten words :

'Thou hast renounced as sinful, Sire, the throne
Thy mother did demand and thy father gave,
Although thyself art free from blame. And thou
Art come to seek thy brother with anguished heart.
When I behold this self-conquest, I ask
Can even a thousand Ramas equal thee ?
How can a hunter ignorant like me
Thy praises fitly sing ? E'en as the sun
Outshining does devour all other lights,
Thou hast transcended and eclipsed the fame
Of all the sovereigns of thy ancient line!'[2]

Bharata accepted the hospitality lovingly offered by Guha, and then asked him to show the place where Rama had slept while he remained with him. While Guha pointed to him the bed of grass on the stony floor as the bed whereupon Rama passed his night, Bharata could not bear the sight and fell down on the ground shaking all over with intensity of his grief, and soaking the very earth with his tears. And then he gave vent to his excruciating feelings, apostrophising Rama thus :

'Ev'n when I know that thou didst suffer, brother,
Exile on my account and even when
I hear it said thou atest berries wild
And roots as if they were ambrosia,
And sleptest on this bed, I yield not up
My breath! O brother shall not I e'en accept
The crown ?'[3]

And again impelled by brotherly affection, Bharata asked Guha to show where Lakshmana passed the night, to which the loving forester replied :

[1] II xi 33. [2] II xi 35, 36. [3] II xi 40.

'When slept the dark-hued handsome Ram and she
Upon this bed, thy Lakshman with his bow
In hand and with many a sigh and tear did stand
On guard outside the whole night through, without
A wink of sleep.'[1]

Bharata's self-torturing heart found in this news fresh matter for self-reproach and self-condemnation. He exclaimed :

'Of all the brothers born with Ram, I've been
For him the curse of endless miseries,
While Lakshmana stands to remedy them as they
Approach : can mankind sound the depths of love ?
Ah, grand's the service I have done to Ram !'[2]

Bharata now requested Guha to take the vast host across the Ganga. After all others had passed over, Bharata and the dowager empresses of Ayodhya got into a boat along with Guha. As they were crossing the river, Guha asked to be introduced to the queens. The stanzas in which Guha asks and Bharata replies are full of the pathos of passionate self-reproach ; and we shall attempt to translate them for the reader.

As Guha did salute Kausalya great
And asked of Bharata, 'Wilt tell me, prince,
Who is this holy dame ?' Good Bharata
Replied, 'O brother, know her as the spouse
Of him whose court was thronged with vassal kings,
And as the noble queen who lost through my
Unfortunate birth, the happiness that was
To have been hers as mother of the Lord
Who in the ages gone begot the god
From whom doth spring this triple universe !'
Guha now turned to Sumitra and asked
The prince to tell him who she was. 'She is,'
The holy one replied, 'the second wife
Of him who died and left a deathless name
For truth, and mother of him who never parts
From Ram and proves to all the world that Ram
Has got a brother yet.' And last towards her
The hunter looked, who though her lord had died

[1] II xi 42.

[2] II xi 43.

And though her son with anguish wore away
His heart, and Rama wandered in the wilds,
Cared not for them but went on measuring away
With her cruel greed-filled heart, the worlds that Vishnu
Did measure with his feet. And then he asked
'Who may this lady be?' The prince replied
'She is the mother of all these ills and nurse
Of lasting shame; she wears my heart away
With her callousness; for 'midst this endless host
That looks a body reft of life, is not
Her face the only one that is not touched
With sorrow's hue? Her heartlessness doth cleave
My heart in twain. If canst not know her straightway
By her look, then know it is her sinful womb
That held me many a weary month before
My birth.'[1]

At length the whole party landed and pursued their way towards where Rama was staying in the forest. It is the plan of the poet to show off the pure gold of Bharata's character by melting it again and again in the fire of unjust suspicion and calumny. So here also Kamban exposes Bharata to the unjust charges of Lakshmana. The reader will not have forgotten the cruel words that Lakshmana hurled against Bharata when he saw him advancing at the head of the immense multitude towards where they were.[2] But Ram knew the real nature of Bharata and calmed Lakshmana with the words[3] which are a partial compensation for the various attacks aimed at Bharata by unthinking people.

As they were thus discussing, Bharata himself approached, his hands joined in the attitude of worship, his body drooping down, his eyes flowing with tears, his whole person a very picture of anguish of heart.

Rama pointed him out to Lakshmana and said with a delicate irony:

> 'O my Child of the twanging bow, behold the panoply of war in which the angry Bharata advances to attack us.'

But Lakshmana did not require Rama's words in order to realise the injustice of his suspicions. For, as Bharata approached,

His face grew pale; his tongue that even now
Reviled his brother stuck to his palate dumb:

[1] II xi 65, 68-70. [2] *See* page 76. [3] *See* page 52.

His wrath was fled ; his eyes did inundate
The ground with tears ; his bow dropped from his hand :
And he astonished stood. [1]

And Bharata came as the messenger sent by the Earth for her Lord Shri Rama, whose separation she could not bear any more, and saying,

'Thou hast forgotten Dharma and forsaken Truth
Thou hast broken all our traditions.' [2]

he fell at the feet of Rama as if he met his own father come back to life.

Rama embraced him with a fervent love and eyed again and again with grief the hermit's weeds in which Bharata appeared, and thought on a hundred things as possible reasons for the same. At length he asked him :

"Thou art sunk in grief, my child ; is our hero father well ?' Bharata broke to him the unhappy news of his father's death,

and Rama lamented long and deeply for him along with Bharata and Vashistha and his mothers. At length, counselled by Vashistha, Rama offered the funeral oblations to his father, and entertained all that had come with Bharata.

The next day Rama assembled the chiefs and *Rishis* that had come from Ayodhya and at the assembly spoke to Bharata thus :

'Our great father is dead and by his commands the empire belongs to thee. Why then dost not thou wear the crown, but appear in these hermit's weeds ?' [3]

Bharata at once rose up with a visible shudder in his limbs, and joining his hands in reverence looked full in the face of Rama and replied as follows :

'Who is there for righteousness, O brother mine,
But thou thyself ? Wilt break the traditions old
Of our house ? For whom is penance fit but me
Who am the son of her, who with her boons
Rebellious killed the king, and did decree
An exile's life to thee ? Me miserable !
Born from the sinful womb of her who broke

[1] II xii 51. [2] II xii 53. [3] II xii 96.

The hearts of all, I think not yet to seek
My death, nor would I live the anchorite's life :
How am I going now to wash my sins ? . . . . .
When thou dost leave the ancient throne that's thine
Of right and lead the life of eremites,
Shall I forget myself and swerve from right
And rule the earth as one who Dharm destroys ?
Our father dead for very excess of love,
And thou come over to the desert wilds,
Defenceless lies the state : am I a foe
To watch my chance and steel the unguarded crown ?
So right, my brother, the wrong by father done
And th' evil brought by her the mother
Of wickedness, and do return to Oudh
And wear th' imperial crown.' [1]

Rama, however, would not admit Bharata's arguments. He said that his father and mother had ordered him to leave the country, and that he would not make his father a liar in this world by returning to Ayodhya. 'The duty of the son is to increase the glory of his parents and not to make their names a by-word of disgrace. Thy father,' Rama concluded, 'left thee the kingdom by his express command, and by right of birth too it belongs to thee. Take thou therefore the reins of power in thy hands and rule the earth.' 'If the kingdom,' replied Bharata, 'in which thou wert born the eldest son to the king—thou who hast no peer in all the worlds—does really belong to me, then, my brother, I give it away to thee. When the whole kingdom is hungering for thy return, wilt thou pass thy time in selfish *tapas* ? Come thou therefore, O brother, and wipe off its sorrow by assuming the crown !'

Rama would not change his fixed mind. He said,
'If in thy love thou dost bestow thy crown
On me, can it belong to me ? The years
That I agreed to live in the wilderness
Obedient to my father's will, are they
Over today ? Is there a higher virtue
Brother, than truth ? Is there a blacker sin
Than swerving from the same ? Let me therefore
Reside, O brother, for the period undertook,

[1] II xii 97-99, 101, 103.

An exile in the forest lands ; and all
These years rule thou Ayodhya by my command !
When father bid me wear the crown, my child,
I feared to disobey and did submit
My will to his. I bid thee now to rule
The land, and as I did to father yield,
So do thou yield to me and leave thy sorrow.'[1]

Now Vashistha intervened and as preceptor called upon Rama with greater authority, to return to the land and rule Ayodhya. 'But how can I go back,' asked Rama, 'upon the word once given ? Is it right for thee to call upon me to assume the crown, after I had promised to my father and mother to do their bidding ?'

Vashistha could not oppose him with reason and so became silent. And Bharata, finding it impossible to persuade Rama to leave the forest, said in despair :

'If thou wilt not go back on thy resolve,
Let those assume the crown who want to rule :
I'll follow thee and live the anchorite's life !'[2]

The invisible gods, who had been closely following the debate, now thought that if Bharata's determination should induce Rama to return to Ayodhya, Ravana and the Rakshasas would remain unpunished, and so they caused these words to be heard in the assembly :

'It is thy duty Bharata, to rule the empire during all the fourteen years that Rama has undertaken to pass in exile in accordance with the will of his father.'[3]

When these incorporeal words were heard, Rama said to Bharata :

'Behold the Devas have spoken and thou ought not to disobey their words. So at my request and with my authority rule thou the empire, brother.'[4]

Bharata had to yield. But he insisted on one stern condition. 'If thou wilt not come back,' he said, 'exactly at the end of fourteen years and accept the sceptre, I shall light a big fire and burn myself in it.' Rama saw the firmness of his heart, and melting away at his unselfish devotion to himself agreed to his condition.

1 II xii 114-117.
2 II xii 129.
3 II xii 131.
4 II xii 132.

Bharata with many a sob requested Rama to give him his *Padukas*—the wooden shoes that he wore—as he would rule the land in the name of these sacred shoes only as the symbol of Rama's personal authority; and Rama gave them—those shoes that give temporal as well as spiritual salvation to those that worship them in faith and love. And placing them upon his head and shedding tears profusely at the thought of separation from Rama, Bharata at length took his leave with all his host and returned home. But he would not enter Ayodhya, for, was not Rama an exile therefrom? He therefore stopped at Nandigram, placed the Padukas on the throne, and conducted the affairs of the state as their vice-regent, himself living the life of an anchorite!

And how he did pass the fourteen years of Rama's exile!

Not a day passed without his doing worship to the *Padukas* of his brother. He lived with his senses absolutely restrained, a very picture of tenderness and love. Tears would gush forth from his eyes at the very thought of his brother. Although he lived in the midst of plenty, he would eat nothing but roots and wild berries, the produce of the wild country. He would be constantly looking towards the south, the direction from which Rama should return, repeating to himself with tears and sobs, 'he would not belie his word, he will come, he will come.'

At length the day dawned on which Rama was due to arrive in Ayodhya and still there were no signs of his arriving. The anguish of Bharata's heart and his tears increased a hundredfold and he said to himself:

'He wouldn't forget the day agreed with me?
Nor be unmindful of his mother's love
Or anguish mine, and overstay his time.
I fear some evil has befallen him!'[1]

Soon he recovered his poise, saying:

'But who can stand before my hero brother?
Nor gods, nor man, nor beings of the world
Beyond, nor e'en the Three Supreme could win
If him they faced in war!'[2]

[1] VI xxxvii 214. [2] VI xxxvii 215.

But other doubts soon upset him and he resolved to die in the fire as he had declared to his brother at the time of parting from him in the forest. He said :

'But may it be
He thinks I might desire the crown, and stays
Away in the wilderness so that I might
Enjoy the throne in peace ? But now the time
Is past that I should think and hesitate :
I can my torture bear no more, I'll die
And end my anguish with my life !'[1]

He, therefore, had a big roaring fire lighted on the fields and walked towards it. But, in the meantime, the whole city got to know of the matter, and everybody rushed to the field of fire, preceded by Kausalya, the mother of Rama, who hurried towards him weeping and sobbing. When he saw her, Bharata was taken aback and he saluted her falling at her feet. She took him up and embraced him and chid him and nobly lauded him in the following words :

''Tis destiny, my son, that drove thy brother
And father to their several fates ; but what
Is it that thou'rt about, O child ? It is
A thoughtless deed ; for if thou end thy life,
Our chiefs and people and thy mothers all
Will feed the fire and end themselves. Will Dharm
Itself remain alive ? The very world
Will from its orbit swerve and come to an end !
Thou knowest not thy greatness, Bharata !
We have not seen a higher righteousness
With these our eyes than thy own holy life.
Can e'er thy glory fade e'en when the worlds
Dissolve ? Ten million million Ramas ev'n
Can never approach the love immaculate
That burns within thy soul ! If thou shouldst die
That art but Dharma's other self, can earth
And heaven and all that breathes remain alive ?
If this day tarries Ram, tomorrow he
Is sure to come. Think not he'd break the word
He himself gave to thee. Tomorrow if

[1] VI xxxvii 216.

We see him not, be sure he has ceased to live!
But grieving for the death of one, my child,
Wilt thou destroy great Surya's race itself
Up to its very roots? And thou art Dharm
Itself in flesh and blood!'[1]

So spoke the grand-souled Kausalya forgetting even her grief for the delay of Rama in the sight of the immaculate Bharata. She could contemplate the death of Rama without swooning—so much had the sacrifice of Bharata endeared him to her heart. How then could she look on and allow him to fall into the fire in a mistaken sense of sin?

But Bharata would not listen to her. He said,
'Say not, O mother, that thy son has ceased
T' obey thy word. I will no more preserve
My life and risk th' unduteous violation
Of my father's words and all traditions old
Of our race. I'll stand by the oath I made, and keep
My word. I'll also give my life for truth,
And go to heaven. As Rama is the son
And heir, the duty's his alone to save
The state. 'Tis wrong for others to wear the crown.
Besides, obedience to the father's words
And mother's, and the trampling down of tenderness
And love do appertain to Ram alone.
They are impossible for me, my mother!
And I shall die and prove my innocence.'[2]

So saying, he walked round the fire in worship as a preliminary to falling into it. All the people sobbed aloud. But just at that moment Hanuman who had been sent to Bharata by the considerate Rama appeared shouting,

'My Lord is come, the noble hero's come!
Can he survive if thou shouldst take thy life?'[3]

and with his mighty paws extinguished the fire.

And then saying that Rama was being entertained by Bharadwaja, and that that was the reason of the delay of Rama

[1] VI xxxvii 229-234. [2] VI xxxvii 236-238. [3] VI xxxvii 240.

in coming over to where he was, Hanuman showed to Bharata the signet ring of Rama which he brought with him as evidence of the genuineness of his message. Bharata's joy at its sight was not one whit less than that of Sita when she saw it in Lanka. He kissed it, embraced it, and pressed it into his eyes. His emaciated body grew to itself again at the touch of the beloved jewel. He laughed and wept, saluted and embraced Hanuman again and again, fell at his feet, and leaped with excess of joy.

> 'Dance, dance away with joy,' he said to those
> Around; 'run, fly to where our Rama is!
> Let's sing a song of joy! O sinners, why
> Fall ye not at the feet of Hanuman?'[1]

And then,

> The tongues that had been crying for grief, began
> To shout for joy; all eyes began to dry,
> And heads that ploughed the ground were lifted up,
> And all did clasp in worship Hanuman's feet.[2]

Bharata did all honours to Hanuman, gave orders to make all arrangements for a fitting reception to the hero of heroes, and when everything was complete, started with an immense multitude for the *ashram* of Bharadwaja. On the way Hanuman told him all that had happened after Rama went away South, in the midst of which account he gave him the welcome news that Dasharatha had come down on earth at the time of Sita's ordeal and withdrawn the curse against himself and his mother.

Bharata grieved that it was not given to him to help Rama like Lakshmana in the destruction of Ravana. But all the grief and sorrow melted away the moment he saw Rama coming in the aerial chariot towards Ayodhya. He then felt as if he saw his father himself returned to life. He fell at Rama's feet and Rama took him up, and, unable to utter a word in the intensity of his grief and joy, embraced him till their very souls touched. Tears flowed unceasingly from Rama's eyes at the sight of the twisted knot of hair on the head of Bharata which had never been untied all these fourteen years. These tears and the love of Rama's heart, which was like that of the cow for its calf, were enough compensation to the heart of Bharata for the untold mental

[1] VI xxxvii 251. [2] VI xxxvii 247.

anguish that he had been suffering from the moment that he had heard of Rama's exile. And Lakshmana, who had misunderstood him in the early days of the exile, clasped his feet in loving worship. The tortured heart of Bharata had at length found its balsam, and fluttering with joy he took his brother and the Vanara host to Ayodhya and crowned Rama to the delight of himself and that of the whole world. And never did he feel so much joy as when at the time of the coronation he held the white umbrella, the symbol of victory and unstinting liberality, over the head of his brother.

KAMBAN'S SITA

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF

V. V. S. AIYAR

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Publishers' Note

V. V. S. Aiyar had intended to crown his work with the character-study of Sita and had fittingly reserved it to the last. Cruel fate, however, stretched its talons and tragically snatched him away from this world before he could sing Sita's virtues. Though very reluctant to make any additions to Aiyar's work, we felt a certain infelicity in letting the work appear without Sita, and hence, a character-sketch of Sita has been added to this book.

It is written by a member of the Delhi Tamil Sangam. Were we to apologise for including it in this book, we shall never cease doing so at every line of the sketch—we are so fully conscious, as is the author, of its unworthiness. But we owe to the readers, especially the foreign readers, a duty to give them a complete work. We sincerely hope that lovers of Aiyar will accept this chapter in the spirit in which it is offered. To be in keeping with the foregoing chapters, Tamil verses have been translated into blank verse. "Coleridge hit the nail on the head," says Aiyar, when he said, "the translation of poetry into poetry is difficult"; how difficult it is, the author of this sketch has realised only too well in the course of writing it. "Treat your Friends", says Thoreau, "for what you know them to be. Regard no surfaces. *Consider not what they did but what they intended.*" We pray our friends to do the same and overlook the shortcomings in this attempt.

In some places, Aiyar's translations have been repeated; in all such cases, references to the pages where they first appear have been given.

We are greatly indebted to the Rev. John Joseph Crease, Principal of the St. Columbas High School, New Delhi, for his invaluable help in correcting this essay, particularly the verses. An utter stranger to us, he responded immediately to our request and devoted many hours of his valuable time to correct this essay. We alone know what it was like when it was submitted to him. If, after all his loving labours, it is still imperfect—as indeed it is—it is not his fault, but the fault of the poor material we offered him. We thank him most sincerely for his very kind labours.

Our thanks are also due to Miss J. Dixon of the Office of the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom in India for various corrections which she kindly suggested to be made in this essay.

—PUBLISHERS.

SITA

Atop the terrace of the Virgin Bower,
Upon the balcony o'erlooking swans
At play with mates (in lotus-teeming pool),
They saw a dazzling form—and stood entranced—
Effulgence sheer of gold, the fragrance sweet
Of blossoms, taste delicious nectar gives,
The pleasure perfect poesy yields.[1]

Thus the poet ushers Sita into the stage of the *Ramayana*. Rama and Lakshmana, walking down the streets of Mithila, gazing at the various sights to right and left of them and above them, stop enthralled by the sight of Sita on the terrace. Vishvamitra had not told them the real reason of his taking them to Janaka's capital, and so, they were not prepared for this vision.[2]

"The artful Rishi", says Aiyar, "took Rama and Lakshmana through the very street where Sita's bower was situated." Says the poet :

So stood that maiden of rare loveliness
And eye caught eye and each the other ate ;
As quiet they stood, minds into one were fused ;
The hero looked at her and Sita looked at him.[3]

[1] I x 23 Aiyar, well-versed in the genius of the English language, has with unerring appropriateness translated the first two lines as follows :
"The while she stood beside the dovecot fair,
In her virgin bower (*See* page 57)
We have, however, closely adhered to the original. It has been suggested to us that the swans were not *on* the balcony, but the balcony overlooked the swans at play down below. But it is a convention, some may say, in Tamil poetry (*cf. Nala-Damayanthi*) for swans to be by the side of a maid in love. If, therefore, the alternative sense is preferred, the word 'o'erlooking' may be changed to 'amidst the'. The words in 'lotus-teeming pool' are not in the original, but they do not affect the sense in either case.

[2] For the poet's description of Sita or rather his attempt to describe the indescribable, *see* page 7.

[3] I x 35. This rendering is by the Rev. H. A. Popley and appears in his work '*The Sacred Kural*' published by the Association Press, Y.M.C.A., 5 Russell Street, Calcutta. Commenting on verse 10 of Chapter 110 of the *Kural*, Rev. Popley writes "Kambar's *Ramayana* in Tamil has a delightful illustration of this"; and gives the stanza we have quoted above.

Students of the *Kural* will remember Aiyar's translation of the maxim

And when she turned her eyes on him,

> The pair of pointed lances called her glance
> Sank deep in shoulders broad of handsome Ram :
> The lotus eyes of him with sounding anklets
> In turn empierced the bosom of the maid—
> Bewitching like enchantress fair of yore.[1]
> Enchained by lassos called her drinking looks,
> And heart to heart each one adducing 'main,
> He of the banded bow and she with sword-like eyes,
> In turn entered each other's heart.
> That she could not the handsome one embrace,
> The bangled maiden like a statue stood :
> Her heart and will and beauty trailing him,
> The youth with sage dissolved from sight.[2]

Kamban's Sita was of an age to fall in love at first sight, and, in his *Ramayana*, she suffers through forty-two verses the pangs of love. Not a word has passed between the two, and as Aiyar takes care to point out,[3] the first words which Rama speaks to her were when he asked her to stay in Ayodhya while he goes alone to the forests for fourteen years. Rama, in turn, suffers no whit less in the guest-house at Mithila, thinking of Sita whose name even is yet unknown to him. One glance at Sita, the yet unknown, was enough to set aflame the heart of Rama, and mere words about her were enough to enslave Ravana. When Shurpanakha had finished the description of Sita's person, says the poet :

> All his anger, and valour, and sense of shame now left his heart. Struck by the arrows of Manmatha, he forgot Khara, he forgot the disgrace that had befallen him, he forgot the limits of the blessings received by him, but he forgot not the fair of whom his sister spoke.[4]

Even Vishvamitra, the Raja-Rishi, is so much impressed by her beauty that he says to himself :

which reads, "When eyes speak their consent to eyes, the words of the mouth are quite superfluous". Students of *Kamba Ramayana* and the *Kural* will also remember that Kamban has woven delightfully into his verses at various places numerous other maxims from the *Kural*.

1 I x 36. Enchantress—Mohini, a female form of spell-binding beauty, which Vishnu took aeons ago to divert the attention of the *Asuras* while all of the immortality-conferring *amrit* churned from the Ocean of Milk was distributed only to the Devas.

2 I x 37, 39. 3 *See* page 56. 4 Aiyar—*See* page 239.

'Let be that single bow ; would not our Ram
Of mighty arms, like hill of emerald
In hue, e'en break the seven hills besides,
If it was for this lotus-dwelling maid
With smiting eyes like tender mango green
Slit in two.' [1]

Such is the beauty of Sita.

Sita's love was no passing fancy, though it was born in a moment. The *Swayamvara* was to be held the next day, and whoever was able to bend the bow of Shiva was, by a proclamation long since made far and wide, to be given the hand of Sita. She made a terrible resolve which, later, Rama is to relate to Hanuman. He says, as the reader will recollect,

'Tell her I call to mind her great resolve,
When I the bow of Shiva broke in two,
To end herself if I should other prove
Than him she saw with holy Kaushika.' [2]

"Children are to be seen and not heard" was once a popular adage. Even till very recently, and now too in many Hindu homes, the young wife is neither to be seen nor heard. In all her life in her husband's home before she left with Rama for the forests, and in the livelong years of exile in the forests, we hear Sita speak—if we recollect right—only twice, once when, under great stress of emotion, she says,

. . . . 'Right holy's thy purpose to obey
Thy mother's commands, but, lord, thy word
To me to stay at home when thou dost leave
An exile for the wilds unknown, that word
Has pierced my heart.' [3]

and, once again, when she asks Rama pettishly to catch the golden deer himself for her. Otherwise Sita's liquid eyes alone are the quiver-full arrows and eloquent messengers of her love. They were :

1 I xx 36. We have translated here the simile of a tender green mango to the eyes—exotic as it may seem to foreign readers—in order to acquaint the non-Tamils with a very picturesque simile peculiar to Tamil poetry.

2 Aiyar—*See* page 57.

3 Aiyar—*See* page 11.

Far grander than the lovely fawn's—her eyes—
The lance with garland decked,[1] and smiting sword :
The Kay'l[2] her roving eyes envied ![3]
'The killing lance and Death itself, all these,
We would surpass, surpass,' they seemed to say :
The quality of her of dancing eyes
Who can e'er tell, if hill and rampart strong,
Hard stone, and grass saw her and melted sheer ?
E'en so stood she, the Fruit of Womanhood ![4]

It is with these eyes that she steals a glance at Rama on the wedding eve, when she was presented before Dasharatha, and

Her doubts she shed beholding Truth behind
Report of bow uplifted and bow snapped ;
And with the corner of her eyes, the while
She feigned to trim the bangles on her wrist,
She stole a glance and cognised Him without,
Besides within her heart.[5]

For all this speechlessness, Sita's love for Rama was deep and vast. Rama was her very life and soul. "Our finest relations", says Thoreau, "are not simply kept silent about, but buried under a positive depth of silence never to be revealed." "Silence," he says elsewhere, "is the ambrosial night in the intercourse of Friends, in which their sincerity is recruited and takes deeper root". What greater friends are there than lovers ? The love of the Hindu wife grows in such silence. "Even speech", says Thoreau, "at first, necessarily has nothing with it ; but it follows after silence, as the buds in the graft do not put forth into leaves till long after the graft has taken." Sita stands as the ideal to all Hindu India for that speechless wifely love of immeasurable depth.

Till sorrow touched her in the shape of Ravana, Sita remains an unsophisticated woman—we had nearly said child—a very sheltered and petted woman. Dasharatha is immensely proud of the privilege of getting her for a daughter-in-law. "Though I

[1] In token of victory.

[2] Kayal—carp (*cyprinus fimbriatus*) ; a kind of fish, to whose eyes of incomparable beauty, the eyes of damsels are frequently compared in Tamil poetry.

[3] I x 26. [4] I x 32. [5] I xx 37.

have all the worlds seven ever to reign," he exclaims, "it is today that *Thiru*[1] has come to me."

Her mothers-in-law cherished her no less. When she prostrated at their feet after the wedding and sought their blessings, they embraced her and exclaimed :

> 'Who else in womankind more meet than her,
> Who else is there for him of lovely eyes ?'[2]

And they showered on her limitless gifts of gold and ornaments, costly clothes and lands, and a host of handmaidens. Her life was spent very happily in the cloistered seclusion of the palace, surrounded by the most devoted attention which was ever shown to any loved woman or wife.

She waited on the coronation day to see her lord come to her in his new-crowned glory. The reader will recollect the rude shock which she received when she saw him in hermit's garb, and the ruder one when she heard Rama bid her stay in Ayodhya while he wended his way to the wild forests. When she protested in the words we heard a little while ago, Rama said :

> . . . . 'Thy tender feet
> Are not made to tread the stony wilds that burn
> Like the molten wax.' 'But can the stony wilds';
> Said she, 'burn more than separation from
> My Ram ?'[3]

So saying, before Rama could frame any reply, she went back into her apartments, put on coarse robes and, without a word more, stood by his side ready to accompany him to the forests. In this act of putting on the coarse cloth of fibre is revealed Sita's unsophistication. It was more symbolic of her resolve to follow Rama to the wilds than an evidence of her realisation of what the forest life would be. She was so innocently ignorant of the entire outside world that she did not know where the civilised country ended and where the wild forests began. Rama instructs Hanuman, as the reader will remember,

> . . . . 'And last,
> Remind her how, when we had barely passed

1 *Thiru* has two meanings—Prosperity, and Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. Here the word is used in both senses.

2 I xxi 97.

3 Aiyar—*See* page 11.

The gates of Oudh, she stopped and asked, " where is
The forest boundless in expanse ? Are we
Arrived in it ? '[1]

In the forests, the Rishis at every halting place did their best to ensure the comfort of Sita and her lord ; and when the dark-hued handsome Ram and she slept upon their bed, Lakshmana

With his bow
In hand, and with many a sigh and tear did stand
On guard outside the whole night through, without
A wink of sleep.[2]

And how Lakshmana serves his brother and Sita in the forests ! His one study is to look after every little comfort of Rama and Sita and guard them against all enemies, known and unknown. It is he that builds the leaf cottages wherever they move, which evoke these words from Rama :

' And Lakshmana's hands are skilled to build for us
A tasteful cottage home. Ah ! those whom fate
Has helpless cast upon the world, what's
That they'll not learn to do ! '[3]

Whatever miseries or hardships appear, Lakshmana stands at hand to remedy them as they approach. Rama too was well alive to Sita's tender soul and endeavoured to shield her from all knowledge of anything like hardship or the cruelty of the forests. He made the journey through the wilds a veritable picnic. Walking down the banks of the Ganges in the first stage of their journey southward, Rama beguiles the tedium of the journey by pointing out to her the swans and their sport, the swarms of bees, the male elephant and its female coming down to the river to quench their thirst, and many other sylvan sights, and shields from her all that may frighten her timid unsophisticated heart. We shall not attempt the impossible, much as we would love to give the reader a glimpse of the interplay of amorous glances between Rama and Sita at the sight of nature's settings which serve but as a foil to the love each bore the other.[4] The mincing

1 Aiyar—*See* page 57.
2 Aiyar—*See* page 398.
3 Aiyar—*See* page 49.
4 *See* page 13.

gait of the swan makes Rama turn his eyes to the small fair feet of Sita which, to take a phrase from the *Porunarattupadai,* resemble 'tongues of panting dogs and suit her smooth-haired ankles well'. Sita sees the mighty male elephant and a tender smile buds on her face as she looks up at the massive shoulders of Rama. Thus, with love-play of glances, Rama protects Sita at every step from the hard realities of the world.

We shall quote one more instance and close this phase of Sita's character. Sumantra, the charioteer, who brought them down to the verge of the forest, was taking his leave and asked for messages from Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita to the court. Rama gave a long and statesmanlike message to his father; and Lakshmana, the impetuous, said:

> 'Have I a message too for him, as if
> He were my king, ... [1]

and refused to give a message to his father. Both were fully conscious of the import of the occasion and each in his own way was venting the surging emotions in his heart, but Sita was blissfully innocent and when she was asked for her message, she said,

> 'To King and aunts respects mine render first,
> And tell my loving sisters three to tend
> My golden starling and my parrot green.' [2]

Nothing shows more clearly than this message how little had the banishment made any impress on her mind. She is still the playful young queen concerned only for her pets.

Just as Rama in the hands of Kamban has been sublimated into a God, Sita too takes her place with him as of right. Says the poet:

> 'What need for any words from us when they
> Who parted from their bed on ocean dark
> Unite again?' [3]

Sita was the incarnation of Lakshmi herself.

1 Aiyar—*See* page 75. 2 II v 40. 3 I x 38.

For all that, Kamban makes her most human as much in her concern for her pets as in her petulance or in her imperious reproof of Lakshmana.

Like any young wife and many an older matron, Sita could be petulant when her lightest wish was not fulfilled, as we see when she, with tremulous lips, insists on Rama catching the golden deer for her.[1]

When Lakshmana is unwilling to leave her alone and go to the aid of Rama who, Sita believes, had come to harm, she turns on him with rage and contempt and spits out these words :

> 'You heard my prince of faultless character
> Has fallen by the guile of Rakshas vile ;
> And still you tarry ! Are you a brother true ?'[2]

Lakshmana's logical arguments only infuriate her the more, and she brands him with scorching words thus :

> 'And some there are their very life lay down
> On but a day's acquaintance, but you heard
> The dying cry of him your elder one ;
> You startled not ! You stand ! What else can I
> But end my life in fire ?'[3]

The frail woman's strength is her tears indeed !

Two women are designed to be, in the *Ramayana*, the agents of the destruction of Ravana—Sita and Shurpanakha. Shurpanakha failed in her attempt to seduce Rama, and as she watched him turn back into his cottage accompanied by Sita, who was still clinging to him, she left slowly saying to herself,

> 'Deep verily is his love for her.'

Out of this thought was born the plot which fulfils the destruction of Ravana and his host, and consummates the promise which Vishnu gave to the Devas in heaven. In the words of the poet :

> She had the might to lay low root and branch
> The King of sapphire-hued vile Rakshas race :
> She was the deadly cancer born with the quick
> Which bides its time—insep'rable ![4]

[1] *See* page 60.
[2] III viii 4.
[3] III viii 13.
[4] *See* III v 8.

Vibhishana, in his lament over the death of Ravana, sees in the fall of Ravana a deep-laid plot by Shurpanakha, fulfilled by meditated vengeance. He says:

"Nursing the grievance that you killed her unkillable husband, she conspired evil, she of the buck-teeth indenting her lip: the evil wretch has verily her vengeance wreaked!'[1]

"My fault?" she said, in answer to Ravana's query why men should mutilate her, "my fault? It related to a woman whose waist is like the lightning, whose tender arms are like the bamboo stem and whose colour is that of pure gold."[2] And straightway, Ravana lost his heart to her of whom in retrospect Vibhishana says, again in his lament:

'Unless devoured, poisons ne'er devour
Life; but this great poison Janaki,
So called, with eyes just looked at you, and lo!
It wiped out life!'[3]

Thus Shurpanakha introduced Ravana to her 'who was to him poison mortal' and which he instantly 'thirsted to taste, as if it was, the drink immortal'. And we all know the story of how he came in the disguise of a *sanyasi* to Janasthan to possess her.

Sita, the unsophisticated, is slow to suspect the false *sanyasi* when he says:

. . . . 'In sooth I find the Rakshasa
A friend invaluable to men like me.'[4]

She thought within her heart, 'no holy man is he, who thus associates with evil ones,' but she did not know,

Poor innocent, that the wily Rakshasas
Could at their will assume whatever shape
Or form they pleased; and so she didn't suspect
A worser guile.[5]

Sita and Rama had been brought up to respect and adore Rishis, but they cherished righteousness more than everything

1 VI xxxvi 225. 2 Aiyar—*See* page 235.
3 VI xxxvi 220. 4 *See* page 246. 5 *See* page 246.

else in the world. 'The righteous care not whether it is father, mother, or child' but speak up for the right boldly and unequivocally. The reader will recollect that when Vashistha too, who accompanied Bharata to bring back Rama to Ayodhya, joined his words, halting as they were, to the request of Bharata, Rama saluted him with joined palms and said :

> 'That grave commandment they ere laid on me,
> With head bowed low I promised to obey :
> The same you bid me break. So tell me now,
> O worthy one, where lies my duty here ?'[1]

Sita who had stood by when these never-to-be forgotten words were spoken, which silenced Vashistha into shame, Sita, who had heard Rama solemnly promise to the Rishis the utter destruction of all the Rakshasas, and had seen and heard of his might with the bow, was stung into fury when she heard Ravana the *sanyasi* say,

> . . . . 'When the Rakshasas do rule
> The worlds without a peer, what can we do
> Of holy endeavour unless we walk
> Their way, and earn their friendship and their love'[2]

Her fears fled, her timidity shrank back, only her righteous indignation blazed forth.[3]

> 'The while the Prince of Dharma here performs
> Austerities rare,' said she, 'dead will be
> The Rakshasas of sinful walk of life
> And all their kin : thereon the world will rid
> Of menace be ![4]

Ravana interrupted and said :

> 'If thou dost say the men will overthrow
> The Rakshasas with root and branch, forsooth,
> The timid hare would kill the mammoth large,
> And horn-ed deer would gore the mighty lion
> Of cruel claws !'[5]

[1] II xii 128. [2] Aiyar—*See* page 246.
[3] *See* pages 244 to 246 for the earlier portion of this interview.
[4] III viii 56. [5] III viii 57.

Sita retorted with angry tears stinging her eyes ;

> 'It seems you have not heard the battle dire,
> Where perished yon Viradha called Red-Head,
> And Vict'ry-laden Khar and all his host!'[1]

She continued, prophetess-like :

> 'Will you not see tomorrow e'en before
> Your eyes the Rakshasas of Lanka isle
> And all their kin succumb to might of Ram,
> And Devas pure exalted once again ?
> Can Sin o'er mighty virtue e'er prevail ?'[2]

This infuriated Ravana who shouted in bravado :

'Dost thou want the Meru Hill to be uprooted, or the vault of heaven to be broken, or the ocean to be stirred to its depths, or the fire in its bosom to be extinguished, or even the earth to be lifted on high ? Which of these are impossible to Ravana, whose words are few, but deeds are mighty and many, O innocent one ?'[3]

Sita countered in her simplicity :

> 'Cluster of whirling arms, do they lend strength ?
> The clanging anklet hero,—who confined
> The King of Lanka, Ravan you speak of—
> His forest of arms galore, a thousand all,
> Was't not a lad with arms no more than two
> Who felled them all with but his axe ?'[4]

And with this spell she unlocked the doors of evil, and lo, the colossus grew before her eyes and struck her speechless with terror. Ravana stood revealed before her in his true form,[5] and with his ten tongues roared :

> 'Look on my prowess by the Devas served ;
> Me to the earthy worms you dare compare !
> You live, as woman you are, else to eat
> You crushed had I e'en thought : but with the thought
> My life had perished too!'[6]

[1] III viii 58.
[2] III viii 59.
[3] Aiyar—*See* page 256.
[4] III viii 63.
[5] *See* page 249.
[6] III viii 67.

Saying so, he tried to soothe her fears and later voiced his foul desire.

Ravana's open declaration of love is given by Kamban in less than a score of words, and for all the wisdom-destroying passion of Ravana, the words are highly dignified and are not the lustful ravings of a roving libertine. These, as Aiyar had pointed out,[1] Kamban contained in Ravana's unspoken thoughts on seeing Sita: Ravana here says with great restraint,

> 'Be not alarmed, my darling Swan!' he said,
> 'While I on my unbending serried heads
> Do bear on each a crown, and goddesses
> Bedecked with jewels serve at your proud feet,
> Do thou deign share with me the monarchy
> Of fourteen worlds.'[2]

Sita's lotus hands flew to close her ears in horror, while she flung at him these words:

> 'To me, the chaste of Kakutstha the great—
> Who bears the shapely cruel bow of note—
> E'en like the craven cur that coveteth
> The pure oblation those of righteous life
> Offer the flames, what said you, Rakshasa
> Vile?
> 'Doth one lose birth and priceless honour old
> For fear of losing precious life that fades
> E'en as the dew on tiny blade of grass?
> Long ere the cruel darts like thunder strike,
> If you desire the safety of your life,
> And would hide, fly, fly away!'[3]

He was not awed, but said, 'Your husband cannot harm me any, and his darts will fall like arrows of flowers against my rock-like chest'; and entreated again thus:

> 'O Goddess thou to Her on lotus bloom!
> To my body racked by the ill called love of thee,
> Give life; and take the place exalted far—
> Not e'en to Deva damsels giv'n to reach!'
> So saying, he fell prostrate at her feet—

1 *See* page 243. 2 III viii 68. 3 III viii 69, 70.

> E'en he of arms far stronger than the hill
> Which bears aloft the world.[1]

Sita screamed with outraged terror and called in panic on departed Lakshmana for help. Instantly Ravana scooped up her hut with her in it and rose sheer in his chariot into the sky towards Lanka. Thus Sita woke from her trusting simplicity to the cruel world. We have seen how up to the last moment terror only lent her greater courage and firmness to stand unshaken on the codes of life, worthy to be cherished more than life itself.[2]

Ravana carried her off to Lanka and hoped to break her spirit with confinement. Racked by despair mounting with the tedious months, unwashed, unkempt, weeping all day long and the livelong night, eyes swollen with piercing the far northern horizon for Rama who came not yet, terrorised and cajoled in turn by fearful guards, emaciated to the bone by long self-denial of sustenance, Sita, hoped Ravana, would be more malleable. And he comes to her in all his pomp and glory many times to persuade her to take him ; spurned again and again he returns like a cur to her feet. He came once when Hanuman was a hidden witness, and to Hanuman's ineffable joy, Sita lacked not a whit her righteous indignation or adamantine loyalty to her chastity.[3]

Ravana came in state surrounded by a guard of amazons, and Indra and other gods watched unwinking with bated breath and fearfully wondered :

> 'What now, what evil plot thinks he,
> And who will it now end ?'

Hanuman came nearer, the better to watch, repeating in silence the mystic name of Ram. Agonised, with his heart aflutter, he saw her shrinking and trembling, her very life in torment, and him mad with lust, and pronounced a benediction on Janaki :

> 'Blessed be Janaki,
> Blessed be Raghava,
> Blessed the Vedas four,
> Blessed the Brahmanas,
> Blessed be Dharma true !'[4]

1 III viii 72.

2 Cf. *Kural* XIV-1. 'Right conduct to true greatness leads ;
It should be held more dear than life itself.'
—*Rev. Popley's translation.*

3 Another incident which Aiyar had reserved for his chapter on Sita—*See* page 215.

4 V iv 23.

The reader will recollect that Aiyar had pointed out that Ravana had paid other visits before, trying to wear down Sita's will, but he had been spurned time and again.[1] His assurance has, therefore, wilted, and he,

> Who though he met his match in Mahadev,[2]
> Had not e'er his assurance lost, with lust
> And shrinking shame[3] at war within his mind,
> Halting, halting, humbly spoke thus.[4]
> 'The days are passing one by one away,
> And this is all the kindness thou hast shown
> To me!'[5]

he entreated, and bitterly exclaimed,

> . . . . . . 'Mean'st thou t' accept me when I'm dead—
> Aye, murdered by thy cruelty?'[6]
> . . . . . . 'O scorn it not but do accept
> Me as thy slave, who rule the triple worlds
> Without a rival or peer!' He ended,
> And raising his hands above his serried heads,
> He fell prostrating at her feet.[7]

These poisonous words, grown unbearable by repetition, opened the flood-gates of Sita's wrath.

> The words, like smoking skewers, long ere they
> Entered, her ears were scorched; her heart stood still;
> Hot blood inflamed her eyes: she cared not for
> What may befall her life, but stinging words
> Not fit for womanhood, thus spoke:
>
> 'Improper are these noxious words of yours
> To woman treading path of wedded life:

[1] *See* page 17.
[2] Shiva humbled him when he tried to carry away the Kailash Hill with Shiva and Parvathi enthroned thereon.
[3] 'Nan' the original term in Tamil stands for the spontaneous shrinking of the soul from wrong-doing—a sensitiveness to shame.
[4] V iv 25.
[5] Aiyar—*See* page 37. Students of Shakespeare will recall the following lines from Macbeth:
"Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day."
[6] Aiyar—*See* page 247.
[7] Aiyar—*See* page 248.

Oh list to me and learn, you scum of the earth!
Seen you e'er women stony-hearted but
With chastity?

'To pierce the Meru or to crack the vault of heaven,
Or to lay waste the fourteen worlds entire,
Not any but the Aryan's dart there is:
Witting, O witless fool, would you yet say
Unseemly words and your ten heads lay low?[1]

'Because you were afraid that day, you sought
His absence, so you sent a crafty deer,
And by your skill in *Maya* came disguised:
If live you would, this moment set me free.

'When him, the poison to your cursed race,
You face, your eyes his gaze would stand indeed!
Your heads twice five and shoulders abundant
Will be but target for Ram's easy sport.
You are a fighter bold indeed! Did not
Jatayus fell you down to earth that day?

'He who lived on the hill you took—the same
Who with his cruel feet did crush your pride—
His Meru bow with which he sped the dart
Which wiped away the fortresses three, you wot?
Seems you heard not the boom that noted day,
When it was snapped, as of but little might,
By prowess of the arm of Ram my mate!

'You boast of hill uplifted; you declare,
'The mammoths guarding points twice four, I crushed';
You dared not come the while Ram's brother stood
At hand; yet bold you are to prostrate flat
At feet of woman too!

'O you of baleful eyes inspiring fear
In heaven and earth, I pray forsake forthwith
Your evil ways. The lotus-dwelling Lord,
Or Vishnu, Brahm, did you mistake my Ram
For one of these? You utter simpleton!

[1] *See* also page 17.

'O think not lightly these are but mere men;
If mighty Kartavir of thousand arms
Was by a man laid low, do ponder well
On might of Ram!

'If you despise them for they are but two,
The world's Destroyer on the Day of Doom,
Is he but one or more? When war is come,
How true are these my words you shall perceive!
Alas you will for certain lose your all
And perish dire!

'The Rishis did relate your prowess great,
And fame of Rakshas might; if natheless they
Defaced your sister dear, and brothers' arms
And feet did lop, would you not think on it?

'The news of him who severed one and all
The mighty limbs of him of thousand arms—
E'en he who held your twenty while he smote
Your face till blood your twice five mouths bespat,
And more, immured you too—have you not heard?
O you outcaste to righteous path!

'To spells the biting serpent will lend ear,
But you, O Reveller, there is not one
To counsel what is meet and what is not,
And give rebuke.[1] But those there are who but
Reflect your thoughts, and you subvert. And so,
Couldst this result in aught else but your end?'[2]

Ravana's mounting anger surged forth and would tear and eat her up but love opposed, and he departed and yet departed not. Love won, and he said some conciliatory words[3] and went his way 'bearing her image away in his heart'.

Sita's unwavering firmness in the face of the greatest dangers and unimaginable hardships has been, and will continue to be, a beacon light through the centuries for millions of Hindu women caught in the sea of a wife's life, where the oglers are the rocks.

[1] Cf. *Kural* XLV 8. 'Behold the prince who reposeth not on the support of men who can rebuke him: he will perish even when he hath no foes.'—*Aiyar's translation.*

[2] V iv 38-42, 45, 46, 49-51, 57-59. [3] *See* page 18.

the libertines the sharks, the abductors are the storms, the silver-tongued family friend the sunken coral reef, and the village zamindar is Ravana himself.

Much as Sita, in her fury roused, captures our imagination, her despondency and her rejoicing do no less pluck at our heart-strings, and we weep with her, we sigh with her, and our body and soul swell with joy at her joy.

The poignancy of Sita's grief in her solitude and the none-the-less pathetic rejoicing on seeing Rama's ring have been painted by the master-craftsmen of the epic with an intensity that has deeply moved not only scholars, but, in the re-telling through countless generations, has lost nothing and yet sways multitudes through story-telling, the stage and cinema, and even the crude village festival theatre with rough yokels for actors and a property tree for a background.

Of Sita in tears, the poet says,

> The noble Birth, the Chastity,
> The Patience of extremest kind,
> Benevolence and Feminine Grace,
> If all these had a form and lived
> Amidst surging sea of water,
> It is Seetha shedding tears ;
> A God with human heart is she. [1]

In twenty heart-ringing stanzas, Kamban portrays her state and her despair-laden thoughts even while Hanuman was entering the *Ashokavana* where she was kept captive. [2]

> Surrounded by the thronging Rakshasis
> Of hefty loins, like mountain med'cine herb
> Sheer foreigner to moisture, even so,
> Shrivelled was she of bloom ; and even like
> Her slender waist, her body all was worn.
>
> Forsaken had her eyes all sleep or droop
> Of lids in weariness, or even wink :
> Of body lustreless like a lamp in th' sun,
> So like a doe 'midst fang-ed tigers wild,
> She seemed.

[1] *A Garland of Tamil Poetry* published by the Karanthai Tamil Sangam, Tanjavur.

[2] *See* page 213 *et seq.* for the description of Sita as Hanuman saw her.

Fall, sob, burn the body o'er ;
Start, yearn, grieve, think on Ram
And worship mute ; droop, quake, sigh ;
With racking woe weep—naught else but these
She knew to do.

The heavy cloud, collyrium so black,
Aught else deep dark,[1] espying would shed tears
Onrushing to the sea.

'I'd fain give up this life, but seldom can
One's fate surmounted be,' she feared and thought,
For sake of Surya's race and blot thereto,
He would come, come he would, the Veda's Lord :'
Thus hoping e'er she quartered all around
The compass points with piercing eyes.

. . . . . . She knew not any other than
The single garment rarer far than smoke :
Her body stranger to swan-sporting pool,
Just like a figurine—which Manmatha
Did mould from ocean nectar—grimed with smoke,
E'en so her body was ! [2]

She would, puzzled, muse :

Perhaps Lakshman met him not or haply he knows not there's one Lanka amidst the surfing sea.

or

Though the King of Vultures dead be,
Are there none besides, my state to reveal ?

or

Hearing the thoughtless words me sinful uttered to Lakshmana, did he forsake me, for, I was wanting in wisdom ?

[1] Rama was dark-hued. [2] V iii 3-5, 7, 9, 11.

or

Deeming Rakshasas would have spared me not this long while, but would have feasted on me, did he even so conclude ? 'Now, is there aught I can do'.

or

[1]Perchance his brothers and mothers, have they come
Again, and called him back to lovely Oudh ?
But he would never return, the while the days
To Kaikey vowed unfulfilled yet remain.
Alas, has any ill befallen him ? [2]

She would recall the image of Rama scene by scene through the years past, and suffer tortures bitter-sweet.

She'd swoon remembering her dauntless lion
As he stood with beaming face resplendent far,
The while the daughter stern of Kekay said,
'This foeless country wide your brother's is.' [3]

Again,

She'd meditate on that fair face of his,
Which both when bidden by his father dear
To rise to throne imperial of Oudh
As well as when his mother ordered him
To leave his all and live a forest life,
Just like the lotus bloom in picture drawn
Was e'er the same !

She would pine away,

Recollecting those shoulders bunching taut,
To break in twain, long ere one could suspect,
The Meru bow the fire-eyed God,—e'en he
With Ganga-laden crest—did wield of old.

Again, she would be agitated thinking on him—as peerless friend—when he said

1 Aiyar—*See* page 70.
2 V iii 12-17.
3 V iii 19.
4 V iii 20. Aiyar—*See* page 40.

To him who plied the Ganges deep, Guha—
A lowly forester as e'en he was—
'Lakshman my brother here is brother thine;
And thou my comrade; and this maiden here,
Is brother's wife to thee.'[1]

Her form would thrill again at thought of when
He gently freed his hand from hers—which ere
Her sire had with her's clasped,—and lifted up[2]
Her tender foot in Vedic rite of yore.[3]

She would grieve, recalling to mind:

The pain of Rama when he saw his brother
Wear not the crown upon his head, but wear
The dusty twisted knot of hair.[4]

She would sob inconsolably thinking of him as he was when

Bereft of heritage, ere to the wild
Forests he left, on greedy Brahmana
A herd of heifers he bestowed and saw
His boundless avarice, and how a smile
Flitted across his face![5]

And she lifted her hands over her head in obeisance, as to her mind came:

The single dart he sped on Indra's son[6]
And pierced its eye and lo, the raven world
Entire fell sightless by that single feat![7]

Ravana intruded on her in this state to plead his case again[8] and we saw how she was roused to white-hot fury and piled insult upon insult on him till he slunk away like a whipped cur. She

1 V iii 23.

2 A symbolic ritual in the Hindu marriage ceremony when the bridegroom lifts the foot of the bride and, placing it on a curry-stone, directs her to look at the Morning Star (Venus), the personification of Arundhati—the wife of Rishi Vashistha and the ideal of Chastity.

3 V iii 24.

4 V iii 25. Aiyar—*See* page 49.

5 V iii 26.

6 The story will be found later on, in Sita's own words, in the message she gives to Hanuman to carry to Rama.

7 V iii 28.

8 *See* pages 247 and 324.

fell to soliloquising again, and deep despair swamped her heart; and she sank under it even to the point of determining to take her life.[1] Hanuman revealed himself by pronouncing aloud the life-saving name of Ram, and, after establishing himself in her confidence by speech and message, he presented to her Rama's signet ring.[2]

Sita's relief and belief have been mounting, step by step, from the moment of hearing Rama's name, through suspicion, relief, trust, confidence and joy; but the sight of the ring was as a talisman to her and threw her into a delirium of ecstasy. " What shall I compare it to ", says the poet: " was she

> Like e'en more dead unearn-ed *mukti* [3] gained,
> Or the fallen from *Jnan* [4] to Reality returned,
> Or the barren woman who a child begot—
> To what shall I compare her state ? "
>
> She took the ring and now to her bosom pressed;
> Now set upon her head; and now on eyes
> In kiss impressed: her shoulders filled with joy.
> She wilted, cooled, burned; her breath did cease:
> And revived anon.
> She'd bury her nose in it; now hug it close
> To her bosom; wiping off the clouding tears
> From her joyous eyes, would gaze so long at it;
> Would think to utter words but words would fail:
> With mounting frenzy she put it in her mouth ! [5]

Such was Sita's capacity for joy.

We shall see that Sita, pining as she was to rejoin her lover, and had, but a little while ago, been quartering all the points of the compass with her eyes for Rama's coming, and had, a moment since, resolved to end her life in despair, is still the supreme woman, ever mindful of what is befitting her chastity. Hanuman had just shown her his *vishvarupa* [6] to prove to her how he crossed the sea. Impelled by perhaps a suspicion of a desire to exhibit his prowess, and certainly, no less, by a genuine eagerness to end quickly Sita's misery, and serve Rama, he offers to carry her back on his shoulders to Rama.

1 *See* page 216 *et seq.* 2 *See* page 216 *et seq.*
3 Release from the cycle of births and deaths.
4 Consciousness of God. 5 V v 64-67. 6 Colossal form.

When he said those sweet words, 'it is not impossible for him' thought Sita, and replied thus to him, who stood even like a yearning calf before its mother.

> ''Tis not impossible and well befits
> Your prowess ; truly what you contemplate
> You would achieve ! But 'tis not proper far,
> Methinks, in my artless femininity
> Of scanty sense.' [1]

She perceives the extreme love and devotion that prompted the offer, but recognises more clearly the utter impropriety of accepting it ; and with a delicacy, which only the truly great can be capable of, she refuses gently, piling reason upon diverse reason, which make Hanuman acknowledge the rightness of her words, without feeling foolish or sorry that he spoke. She begins, as we saw above, by belittling her sensibilities. She says, next, that she would be an encumbrance.

> 'When o'er the ocean deep, the cruel foes
> Surround and let fly angry darts at you,
> Nor poison fell to them, nor sure defence
> To me will you be ; but encumbered sore,
> Falter, O you without a peer !' [2]

A slur to Rama's name, she knew, would hurt Hanuman to the heart and, therefore, she says next,

> 'There's one thing further more : the Aryan's [3] bow
> Of mighty victories will tarnished be.
> In sooth, could there be worser gratitude ?
> Did you too think to trick me off e'en as
> The curs [4] that ran away with the *amrit* [5] pure ?' [6]

Hanuman had, just a little while ago, told her of the mighty army mobilised on the mainland. She recollects this and, drawing the next argument from the former one, says with vehemence :

> 'Unless in th' war to come, my liege, the Ram—
> His bowmanship displaying to the worlds—

[1] V vi 12. [2] V vi 13. [3] Rama.
[4] Maricha and Ravana. [5] Sita. [6] V vi 14

Does feed to crows the eyes of him that dared
To look on me, shall I yet live ?
Until those bowmen—whose exulting strings
In triumph twang—their archery do crown,
And mangal-strings of shameless Rakshasis
Are severed with their noses likewise too,
Would e'er my rescued honour honoured be ?'[1]

What of my reputation, she asks, and says :

'Till golden Lanka's heaped a mountain high
With th' bones of th' hateful enemies, my birth
And conduct, stainless chastity, all these,
Oh, how shall I reveal to strangers all ?'[2]

The arguments gather force without offence, and she could now speak of her own prowess :

'What to speak of these afflictive creatures vile
O'er here ? Let be the boundless worlds entire,
I could with curses burn. As slight 'twould be
To prowess great of Ram with th' bow, the thought
I banned.'[3]

The clinching and the only argument could be said now :

'One more there is to say, oh list, true one !
For bar the body of my Knight, e'en you
With senses five contained, or any male,
So named, could this form touch ?'[4]

'So, go .

For, 'tis not meet. Now, to return in haste
To the lord of the Ved is duty thine,' she said ;
And the faultless one replied 'Aye ! Aye !'[5]

In all the ten thousand and odd poems of the *Kamba Ramayana*, barely three or four chapters—*padalams*—are solely devoted to Sita, but, on this small canvas, the poet has painted

1 V vi 15, 16. 2 V vi 17. 3 V vi 18.
4 V vi 19. 5 V vi 26, 27.

her with such intensity and etched detail that, even years after we had laid aside the book, it is she who comes first to mind when thinking on the *Ramayana,* and it is the verses from her lips which well up to *our* lips from the springs of our heart. Swinging from the depths of despair to rapturous heights of joy, only to sound the bottom of despondency again, she keeps us prisoner with her in the lonely isle. Hanuman, after acknowledging that she was right, asked her for a message to Rama. Her reply is full of misgivings and, in spite of her, a certain bitterness rings in her sweet words.

> 'But one more moon shall I endure e'en here—
> This is my message true, O righteous one !—
> More, I shall not my life sustain. And this,
> I swear by him my King ! Take this to heart !
>
> 'Tho' I might not be fitting mate to him
> Of garland rolling chest, tho' his heart be void
> Of ruth, tell him it is his duty plain
> To save his valour's fame.
>
> 'In but one moon austerity mine expires ;
> If he does not come here within that time,
> Let him on banks of Ganga's tidal flood
> With lotus hands of his my obsequies
> Perform !
>
> " Remind him of the solemn vow he made
> That day he took my hand in wedlock rite :
> 'Not e'en in thought will I in this my life
> A second woman touch' ; he swore to me :
> Drum these words in his ear."
>
> 'Do make it clear to him that I but crave
> With salutation low this single boon :
> E'en if I stay and end my life down here,
> Let it be granted me to be reborn
> And gain the blessing rare which ends all sin—
> To touch his form divine.
>
> 'The while he rules enthroned, or rides in state
> The haltered elephant with bells of choice,
> Or his resplendent aspects manifold
> On avenues to see I am not blest.

Of what avail is it to speak of them ?
Let me on my past Karma dwell.

'To the world sore languishing for him so long,
At his mother's grief, and at distress which Bharat
Endures, he'll speed. To me in agony
Down here, how would he come ?'[1]

Hanuman, the skilful ambassador and devotee of Rama, consoles her in a long spirited speech. "What would good men and the learned say," he exclaims "if we returned without rescuing you from the captivity of the unrepentant foes. . . . . . You will see here rise a huge mountain, reaching to the sky—rare even for Vali to cross—of the *thalis*[2] discarded by the Rakshasis. And he concluded with a dire oath,

'Within that day you have now said to me
If he does not deliver you from durance vile,
O dame of fragrant locks, let infamy
Unutterable and sin envelope him.
Thence Ravana is *he* o'er there and *he*
Here now is truly Ram.'[3]

Joy again suffused Sita's face, and she now gave out certain secrets to tell Rama as irrefutable evidence of Hanuman having truly seen her. In doing so, with characteristic feminine skill, she conveys to him a hint not to blurt out to Rama everything she had said before.

'Now speed thee hence ; may you avoid all harm :
I have no more to add ; all that I need,
I've said. To my liege repeat, as wise you are,
What is but propitious.'[4]

'Whisper to him how

Once on the mountain side where elephants
Do range, a raven came and clawed me sore
With cruel toes, and lo, in fiery rage

1 V vi 29, 30, 32, 34-37.
2 The symbol in gold of the married state, and which is snapped off with a wrench and discarded on being widowed.
3 V vi 74.
4 V vi 76.

He took a blade of grass that lay at hand,
And one relentless dart he sped.

"Recount how Sayantha, the lustful crow—
Devender's son—to Shiv and all the gods
Besides in terror flew, and each in turn
Asylum barred ; and all with one accord
Cried : 'Fall, fall at his lotus feet
And refuge gain!'"

"Say how when he, affrighted far, to earth
Flew down entreating loud 'O Lord, your feet,
Your feet's retreat I seek,' and prostrate fell,
The Bounteous Lord well pleased did bid the dart
Depart content with but one baleful eye.
Forthwith the raging dart divine was spent.

"'Because you cried, 'asylum 'sylum grant,'
The Lord said, 'straightway on your heinous crime
Forbearance I bestow.' And he decreed,
'Hence let the raven race, whose form you bear
In front of me, have but one eye-ball each.'
And so it came to pass. E'en this relate."

'Add how as Sayantha left freed of fear,
The Devas flowers rained, and Lakshmana
Uncomprehending puzzled stood : e'en thus
This victory so sweet relate.' [1]

Though Sita felt great consolation when Hanuman said that the *thalis* of the Rakshasa women would pile up into a huge mountain, and though she herself said 'where shall my honour be if Ram did not cut off the noses of these shameless women, nay, make them all bereft of the *mangal* string', she was truly pity personified indeed. We saw how when Sumantra asked her for a message to the court,[2] her one thought was for her pets, and she said :

'And tell my loving sisters three to tend
My golden starling and my parrot green.'

Again, when she was assailed by doubts and fears, now torturing herself with the thought that Rama had perhaps forsaken her for

[1] V vi 77, 78, 79, 81, 82. [2] *See* page 317.

the thoughtless harsh words she spoke to Lakshmana, and now with the fear that he may have concluded that the Rakshasas would not have spared her so long and might have eaten her up, an inconsequential concern for Rama intrudes itself between her fears, and she grieves wondering :

> 'Now who serves him the tender salad leaves,
> And when he guests receives how would he tend ?'[1]

We see it again, her thoughtfulness for others, in her request to Rama while they were flying back to Ayodhya at the end of the fourteen years' exile. She looked in her aerial car and missed something. They were just then passing over a town, and when Rama, who was pointing out to her along the route the sites of many a poignant memory, said, 'this is Kishkinda,' she spoke up :

> 'If this be Kishkind, lord, oh list to me!
> Encircled by this mighty martial force—
> Which e'en the Devas dread—but circled not
> By retinue of countless damsels fair,
> If I shall reach Ayodhya all alone,
> My womanhood would greatly clouded be :
> 'Tis duty thine to take into this car
> The Vanar damsels too!'[2]

Who but Sita can picture better the anxiety-ridden hearts of wives parted from husbands, and sweethearts from lovers, and it is solicitude which prompts her request, but she would, like all givers, make the receiver a giver seem.

This natural pity becomes divine in the case of the Rakshasa women. After Ravana had been killed, Rama sent Hanuman to tell Sita the news. When he had re-breathed life into her wasted frame, Hanuman looks around and sees the Rakshasis who had guarded her in her captivity and had terrorised and cajoled her in turn to yield to Ravana. He turned to Sita and prayed "Permit me to annihilate all these Rakshasis but Trisadai[3], and burn them in their own sins." The terrified Rakshasis rushed to Sita, and clasping her feet would not forsake them.

1 V iii 15.
2 VI xxxvii 176.
3 Daughter of Vibhishana and the only friend to Sita in her captivity.

'Fear not, fear not,' assured the Mother Ruth,
And turning on the Maruthi, she asked
'What harm have these e'er done, but spoke to me
E'en as he bid them speak?'

'It is by Karma done by me of old
This tribulation came, O you far more
Loving than mother mine? In sooth, these are
Not more inhuman than the hunchback maid:
Mind not what's past, O thou wise one!'

'Grant me this prayer,' thus entreated she;
'Desist from torturing the minds of these
Affrighted fools—the home where evil dwells.'
Thus pleaded she whose face made e'en the moon's
Break out in spots with envy green![1]

Thus she craved a boon for her enemies, even she who conferred the boon of immortality on Hanuman. But it is Sita, the ideal wife, who has guided down the centuries countless Hindu wives, and earned for them too a share of her undying fame and glory. Sita has never a thought for herself, but it is always Rama's honour which is her concern night and day. For this, she would even lay down her life. Rama sent Vibhishana to fetch her from the *Ashokavana*. When Vibhishana gave her the message and asked her to get ready, clothed and adorned as befitted the queen of his Saviour, Sita insisted on going to the presence of Rama as she was, unwashed, unkempt, 'a figurine begrimed with smoke'. But Vibhishana said, 'These are the commands of Rama,' and she said no more. The celestial maidens, Rambai and others, took great pleasure in getting her ready for her reunion with her lord, and right royally fitted her out in the most costly garments and ornaments. Vibhishana seated her in a *vimana* and brought her to Rama. Her heart swelling with joy as she neared him, she shed her sorrow thinking,

'My mate in chain of births, and mate of mine
Nevertheless when irksome birth shall cease,
I have adored. It matters not if hence
My mind I lose or even here fall dead.'[2]

[1] VI xxxvii 34, 36. [2] VI xxxvii 59.

To her, Rama said these words, at which the Rishis and Devas, and countless women too, albeit called Rakshasis, and all the monkey host—all who stood around—shuddered, and a horrified tumult arose. Rama said :

'You loved the fleshly form, and honour stained ;
And yet died not : but risked your conduct pure
And stayed content one year in capital
Of Rakshasas of evil walk of life.
With what design have you returned unabashed ?
Is it that I would cherish you ?

''Twas not to rescue you I filled the sea,
And felled down root and branch the Rakshasas
With all their arms of might like thunderbolts,
And overthrew the lonely foe as well.
It was for naught but to redeem my name
That I to Lanka came ?

'Did you e'en eat the flesh of living kind
As sweeter far than amrit pure ? And took
Your fill of heady wine and lived content ?
Do tell me, loveless one, could there be more
Agreeable fare for us as well ?

'The lustre of your virtues all has gone :
In noble lineage you were not born,
But like the spineless worm, born from the earth,[1]
You have but played your part too well !

'Womanhood and its glory, Noble Birth,
And the adamantine will called Chastity,
Enlightenment, Propriety, Truth itself,
By your birth have vanished like the noted fame
Of the king without beneficence.

'The senses five would they contain, and in
Their conduct celibate, with matted hair,
Austerities endure. And should some ill
Befall them meantime, would e'en with their lives
Atone—the women of propriety fine.'[2]

1 Sita was turned up by the plough in a furrow by King Janaka and was brought up by him.

2 VI xxxvii 62-67.

Sita was stunned by these words.

And grieving like a wound by probe explored,
Blood and tears suffused her downcast eyes;
With senses dazed she heaved a sigh.

And she recoiled e'en like the lovely deer,
By raging thirst consumed in desert wild,
(And watched by teeming vultures from above)
Which sees a water-hole, but quicker still,
Sees a barrier insuperable![1]

She composed herself presently, and with great restraint addressed these words to Rama:

"The son of Vayu[2] came and seeing me
Did truly say, 'My Lord, he would here come.'
Did not the lofty one tell you, my Lord,
My languished state? In sooth, a messenger
He failed to be!"

'Austerities mine, and chastity so pure,
And all that I endured so long down here
Have madness been, and, yea, in vain. For, them,
O Noble one, you have not realised!

'I may be the chastest to the world entire,
And of heart unfaltering, beyond e'en Brahm
To shake. Ah, foolish me! If you, who are
The focus of the world deny, would God
Acknowledge me?

'Though He the lotus-borne[3] and the Lord on the bull[4]
And the Lord of Righteousness with conch in hand,[5]
Were they to gaze as in the ball of glass
On palm outstretched, could they a woman's heart
E'er gauge?

'If thus with them, for whom do I retail
Down here austerities mine void of flaws?

1 VI xxxvii 70, 71. 2 Hanuman.
3 Brahma. 4 Shiva. 5 Vishnu.

Far better death than aught else ; fitting too
It is, O Ved !—The same is your command ;
The same my fate as well !'[1]

Sita had had forebodings of the probability of some catastrophe like this. The reader will no doubt recall to mind her misgiving which she expresses in these words :

. . . . 'But sooth, will he admit again
One who has lived so long in this sinful land ?'[2]

and adds in self-reproach :

. . . . . . 'Where is the chaste
In story or in life who has loved her life
When forced away from home by lustful men ?
Is not my honour great, and modesty,
Who cling e'en now to life ?'[3]

Thus she castigates herself, and she further poses to herself the question, 'how shall I vindicate my chastity ?'

. . . . . . "Ah, wretched me !
When Rama shall have destroyed his[4] race for e'er
And freed me from my prison, how shall I prove
My virtue uncorrupt, if he should say,
'Away, thou art not worthy of my love ?'"[5]

'So death alone is Dharma's way for me,'[6] she had concluded long before in *Ashokavana*.

So, now she asked Lakshmana,—who whatever misery comes, 'stands ready to remedy it as it approaches'—to light a huge fire, and apostrophising it thus :

'If by thought or word I'm stained, let fury yours
Burn me, O Lord of the flames !'[7]

she saluted her lord and leapt into the fire.

1 VI xxxvii 73-77.
2 & 3 Aiyar—*See* page 215 *et seq.*
4 Ravana's.
5 Aiyar—*See* pages 215 *et seq.*
6 Aiyar—*See* page 216.
7 VI xxxvii 84.

The Lord of Fire rose from the flames bearing her unhurt in his hands and led her up to Rama's side. Rama accepted her, and the world breathed.[1]

"Even the Gods Three, could they grasp a woman's mind?" said Sita addressing Rama; we could alter her words and say with absolute truth, "Even the Gods Three, could they Sita's virtue comprehend?" Sita asked Rama, "Did not Maruthi tell you, my lord, my state?" He did indeed! But could even Rama fully comprehend?

'What pity,' thinks Hanuman, on first discovering Sita in the *Ashokavana*,

'What pity 'tis not given to Ram to see
With his own eyes this holy one, as she
Does lead her life austere in Lanka's grove.'[2]

We shall, in our lame and halting words, try to give the reader a faint idea of the exulting report of Hanuman to Rama on his return from Lanka, and conclude our sketch of the Divine Sita's character-study.[3] From Dadhimuka's account of the riotous behaviour of the Vanaras, Sugriva guessed that Hanuman had returned from Lanka, and Rama stood longingly watching his coming.

"Came Han'man: and coming, worshipped not
His Majesty's twin feet but turned to her[4]
Devoid of bloom; with hands held o'er his head
In reverence, he fell down flat on earth,
And long intoned her name!

[1] "There is a blot in Rama's love" writes Aiyar (*see* page 61), "but of that we shall speak when we come to Sita", he promised. We cannot know of which particular incident he was thinking; it may have been of this Ordeal of Sita. We are but a worm and not Aiyar, and it is not for worms to gaze on the sun, with blots or without.

[2] Aiyar—*See* page 214.

[3] "Hanuman's account of his work to Rama," writes Aiyar (*see* page 226)," occupies a very high rank in literature for the grandeur of its sentiments, but we shall reserve it for the chapter on Sita as it deals chiefly with her." But he reserved it too long to our lasting regret, and it is with humility and dragging hesitation that we have ventured to translate but a fragment of this passage. We dare not attempt more, for, we shall but display our utter incompetence the more we venture further.

[4] The direction in which Sita was in far off Lanka.

I saw,' he sang in ecstasy, 'I saw
With my own eyes the Gem of Chastity
In sea-girt Lanka in the south. Cast off
Your fears, my Lord, and grief of old!

'On privilege as noble wife to you,
On truth as worthy daughter to your sire,
On proper conduct fitting her descent
From Jan'ka, King of Mithila, in sooth,
She has a crown bestowed—the Goddess mine!

'To gold, gold is the match; to her, she 'lone;
She matches you to you alone; and me,
She grants as well, there's none but me to match!

'O bowman brave with mighty shoulders broad!
In roaring sea-laved Lanka on the hill
Not maiden rare of virtues great I saw,
But Noble Birth and Patience Boundless self
And her called Chastity, I saw all three
Step a dance in ecstasy!

'In her eyes you dwell, and in her thoughts as well;
Or her lips you play, and in the very depths
Of her heart besides; and in unhealing wound
Which Manmath's dart of blossoms has bored deep.
Then how could it be said that she has e'er
Parted from you?

'In Lanka 'midst the ocean deep,
Beneath sky-reaching forest dark
Unknown to either morn or noon,
In a bower under lofty trees,
In the grassy hut your brother built,
Dwells she—the stern austerity
Of Austerity herself!' [1]

1 V xv 55, 58-60, 62-64.

APPENDICES

INDEX

ETC.

APPENDIX I

GARUDA'S FLIGHT [1]

(Please see foot-note 2 on page 93)

The while this happened down below the Devas stood
Aghast, alarmed, and thrown into confusion sore,
Afraid to think how far 't would go and how would end ;
E'en then the Lord of Eagles, Garuda, at hand,
With quaking heart intent on sure deliverance,
Slowly he emerged from that encircling darkness.

Espying Ram of dauntless heart dismayed by the snake—
His grace withdrawn from stubborn King of Lanka isle,
And more, the world entire besides—the Garuda
Ne'er awed before, his heart now lost and grieved ;
And he sped on tempestuous wings which shook the Mer
And lit the world around. The mammoths guarding close
The compass points did cower with unwinking eyes
Now closed in shrinking fear.

1 Students of Latin will recall to mind the famous line from Virgil's *Æneid* (Bk. VIII, 596) which runs as follows :—

Quadrupedante putrem sonitu quatit ungula campum.

Most of Virgil's Æneid is in hexameter verse—a hexameter being a foot of one long vowel and two shorts, or a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed ones—corresponding to dactyl in English poetry. Here is the above line divided according to the metre.

Quad-ru-pe/dan-te pu/trem son-i/tu qua-tit/un-gu-la/cam-pum

The last foot is of two long syllables. The line gives the sound effect of the horses' hooves as they gallop along. The literal translation of this line is :

"The hoof beats the mouldering plain with a trampling noise."

Take another example, written entirely in anapæsts :

The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold

The horses of the Assyrians can be heard galloping in these lines, and that is why Byron used anapæsts.

Kamban's stanzas translated here have to be read in the original to enjoy the *sandham* (metrical foot) which he has used to make the lines reproduce in their cadence the flight of a majestic bird. Each line ends with an upward lift, producing the extraordinary impression of the soaring of a bird in flight. We have used in this translation the iambic hexameter, *i.e.*, an unstressed and stressed syllable to a foot and six feet to the line. Being the flight of a bird and not the gallop of a horse, the iambic foot has been considered quite suitable to indicate the tempo.

We make no apology for this poor effort, for we do not pretend to have any skill in the art of composing verses.

His eyes that scan thro' million leagues beyond,
A stream of tears they shed the while he saw below
The holy form of Ram o'ercome by trials sore :
And spurred thereat, the while he winged thro' space,
The sea so cool now waves on waves it threw on high,
The worlds their darkness shed, the wings the Vedas sang,
The spheres their work forsook, the serpent slack became.

His crown, it rolled the darkness up and sunshine spread ;
To farthest limits of the points eight sped its rays
Of brilliance like the moonlight bright and pierced
The bounds as well. Such was the glory of his crown
Whose sheen was thrice as great as fiery orb of him
That rises o'er the ancient mountain called the Mer.

A mountain too he seemed in the sky by lightning laced—
With gold and gems galore and scented blossoms sweet
Ahugging and releasing 'gain his mighty chest.
He seemed as well a radiant sun from south astir
And northward bound.

With golden visor shining on his forehead broad,
And garlands sweet with flowers culled from forest wild
In rhythm rolling on his chest, he soared above
And saw the form divine and worshipped from afar,
Assuaging grief of separation long ago.

With both his palms like lotus bud aloft his head,
His radiance illuming clouds above, he dwelt
Again and 'gain on grievous lot of his for years
When he had missed the worship at those lotus feet
And privilege proud of perching up above his flag
The while the seven worlds in worship stood around :
And with intent to reach the earth he hurried on.
Came he and worshipped Him with heart and soul again
And 'gain.[1]

[1] **Book VI, Padalam xix, Verses 243-299.**

APPENDIX II

VALMIKI'S VALI

(See Chapter XI—page 187)

Extracts from Griffith's translation of the

VALMIKI RAMAYANA.

CANTO IV

LAKSHMANA'S REPLY

Cheered by the words that Rama spoke,
Joy in the Vanar's breast awoke,
And, as his friendly mood he knew,
His thoughts to King Sugriva flew :
'Again,' he mused, 'my high-souled lord
Shall rule, to kingly state restored ;
Since one so mighty comes to save,
And freely gives the help we crave.'
Then joyous Hanuman, the best
Of all the Vanar kind, addressed
These words to Rama, trained of yore
In all the arts of speakers' lore :
'Why do your feet this forest tread
By silvan life inhabited,
This awful maze of tree and thorn
Which Pampa's flowering groves adorn ?
He spoke : obedient to the eye
Of Rama Lakshman made reply,
The name and fortune to unfold
Of Raghu's son the lofty-souled :

* * * *

Here Rama stands, his heir by birth,
Whose name is glorious in the earth ;
Sure refuge he of all oppressed,
Most faithful to his sire's behest.
He, Dasaratha's eldest born

Whom gifts above the rest adorn,
Lord of each high imperial sign,
The glory of his kingly line,
Reft of his right, expelled from home,
Came forth with me the woods to roam.
And Sita too, his faithful dame,
Forth with her virtuous husband came,
Like the sweet light when day is done
Still cleaving to her lord the sun.
And me his sweet perfections drew
To follow as his servant true,
Named Lakshman, brother of my lord
Of grateful heart with knowledge stored.
Most meet is he all bliss to share,
Who makes the good of all his care.
While, power and lordship cast away,
In the wild wood he chose to stay,
A giant came,—his name unknown,—
And stole the princess left alone.
Then Diti's son who, cursed of yore,
The semblance of a Rakshas wore,
To king Sugriva bade us turn
The robber's name and home to learn,
For he, the Vanar chief, would know
The dwelling of our secret foe.
Such words of hope spake Diti's son,
And sought the heaven his deeds had won.
Thou hast my tale. From first to last
Thine ears have heard whate'er has past.
Rama the mighty lord and I
For refuge to Sugriva fly.
The prince whose arm bright glory gained,
O'er the earth as monarch reigned,
And richest gifts to others gave,
Is come Sugriva's help to crave ;
Son of a king the surest friend
Of virtue, him who loved to lend
His succour to the suffering weak,
Is come Sugriva's aid to seek.
Yes, Raghu's son whose matchless hand
Protected all this sea-girt land,
The virtuous prince, my holy guide,
For refuge seeks Sugriva's side.

His favour sent on great and small
Should ever save and prosper all.
He now to win Sugriva's grace
Has sought his woodland dwelling-place.
Son of a king of glorious fame :
Who knows not Dasaratha's name ?
From whom all princes of the earth
Received each honour due to worth :
Heir of that best of earthly kings,
Rama the prince whose glory rings
Through realms below and earth and skies,
For refuge to Sugriva flies.
Nor should the Vanar king refuse
The boon for which the suppliant sues,
But with his forest legions speed
To save him in his utmost need.'
  Sumitra's son, his eyes bedewed
With piteous tears, thus sighed and sued.
Then, trained in all the arts that guide
The speaker, Hanuman replied :
  'Yea, lords like you of wisest thought,
Whom happy fate has hither brought,
Who vanquish ire and rule each sense,
Must of our lord have audience.
Reft of his kingdom, sad, forlorn,
Once Bali's hate now Bali's scorn,
Defeated, severed from his spouse,
Wandering under forest boughs,
Child of the Sun, our lord and king
Sugriva will his succours bring,
And all our Vanar hosts combined
Will trace the dame you long to find.'

* * * *

Canto V

THE LEAGUE

From Rishyamuka's rugged side
To Malaya's hill the Vanar hied,
And to his royal chieftain there
Announced the coming of the pair :

* * * *

Thus spake the Vanar prince, and, stirred
With friendly thoughts, Sugriva heard.
The light of joy his face o'erspread,
And thus to Raghu's son he said :
'O Prince, in rules of duty trained,
Caring for all with love unfeigned,
Hanuman's tongue has truly shown
The virtues that are thine alone.

* * * *

If thou my true ally wouldst be,
Accept the pledge I offer thee.
This hand in sign of friendship take,
And bind the bond we ne'er will break.'

* * * *

Thus each to other pledged and bound
In solemn league new transport found,
Then King Sugriva . . . . . .
To Raghu's noblest scion cried :
'O Rama, racked with woe and fear,
Spurned by my foes, I wander here.
Reft of my spouse, forlorn I dwell
Here in my forest citadel.
He spoke, and Raghu's son . . . .
Thus answered with a gentle smile :
Bali, thy foe, who stole away
Thy wife, this vengeful hand shall slay.

* * * *

Canto VIII

RAMA'S PROMISE

Sugriva's heart with rapture swelled,
And thus, by eager love impelled,
He spoke in gracious tone, that, oft
Checked by his joy, was low and soft :
'I, by my brother's might oppressed,
By ceaseless woe and fear distressed,
Mourning my consort far away,
On Rishyamuka's mountain stray.

* * * *

For sobs and sighs he scarce could speak,
And his sad voice came low and weak,
As, while his eyes with tears o'erflowed,
The burden of his soul he showed.

* * * *

'By Bali's conquering might oppressed,
Of power and kingship dispossessed,
Loaded with taunts of scorn and hate
I left my realm and royal state.
He tore away my consort : she
Was dearer than my life to me.

* * * *

CANTO X

SUGRIVA'S STORY

Thus Bali spoke in words severe ;
And then unmoved by ruth or fear,
Left me a single robe and sent
His brother forth in banishment.
He cast me out with scathe and scorn,
And from my side my wife was torn.
Now in great fear and ill at ease
I roam this land with woods and seas,
Or dwell on Rishyamuka's hill,
And sorrow for my consort still.

* * * *

CANTO XII

THE PALM TREES

They sought Kishkindha's gate and stood
Concealed by trees in densest wood.
Sugriva, to the fight addressed,
More closely drew his cinctured vest,
And raised a wild sky-piercing shout
To call the foeman Bali out.
Forth came impetuous Bali, stirred
To fury by the shout he heard.

So the great sun, ere night has ceased,
Springs up impatient to the east.
Then fierce and wild the conflict raged
As hand to hand the foes engaged,
As though in battle mid the stars
Fought Mercury and fiery Mars.
To highest pitch of frenzy wrought
With fists like thunderbolts they fought,
While near them Rama took his stand,
And viewed the battle, bow in hand.
Alike they stood in form and might,
Like heavenly Asvins paired in fight,
Nor might the son of Raghu know
Where fought the friend and where the foe;
So, while his bow was ready bent,
No life-destroying shaft he sent.
Crushed down by Bali's mightier stroke
Sugriva's force now sank and broke,
Who, hoping naught from Rama's aid,
To Rishyamuka fled dismayed.
Weary, and faint, and wounded sore,
His body bruised and dyed with gore,
From Bali's blows, in rage and dread,
Afar to sheltering woods he fled.
Nor Bali farther dared pursue,
The curbing curse too well he knew.
'Fled from thy death!' the victor cried,
And home the mighty warrior hied.
Hanuman, Lakshman, Raghu's son
Beheld the conquered Vanar run,
And followed to the sheltering shade
Where yet Sugriva stood dismayed.
Near and more near the chieftains came,
Then, for intolerable shame,
Not daring yet to lift his eyes,
Sugriva spoke with burning sighs:
"Thy matchless strength I first beheld,
And dared my foe, by thee impelled.
Why hast thou tried me with deceit
And urged me to a sure defeat?
Thou shouldst have said, 'I will not slay
Thy foeman in the coming fray.'
For had I then thy purpose known

I had not waged the fight alone.'
  The Vanar sovereign, lofty-souled,
In plaintive voice his sorrows told,
Then Rama spake : 'Sugriva, list,
All anger from thy heart dismissed,
And I will tell the cause that stayed
Mine arrow, and withheld the aid.
In dress, adornment, port, and height,
In splendour, battle-shout, and might,
No shade of difference could I see
Between thy foe, O king, and thee.
So like was each, I stood at gaze,
My senses lost in wildering maze,
Nor loosened from my straining bow
A deadly arrow at the foe,
Lest in my doubt the shaft should send
To sudden death our surest friend.
O, if this hand in heedless guilt
And rash resolve thy blood had spilt,
Through every land, O Vanar King,
My wild and foolish act would ring.
Sore weight of sin on him must lie
By whom a friend is made to die ;
And Lakshman, I, and Sita, best
Of dames, on thy protection rest.
On, warrior ! for the fight prepare ;
Nor fear again thy foe to dare.
Within one hour thine eye shall view
My arrow strike thy foeman through ;
Shall see the stricken Bali lie
Low on the earth, and gasp and die.
But come, a badge about thee bind,
O monarch of the Vanar king,
That in the battle shock mine eyes
The friend and foe may recognize.
Come, Lakshman, let that creeper deck
With brightest bloom Sugriva's neck,
And be a happy token, twined
Around the chief of lofty mind.'
  Upon the mountain slope there grew
A spreading creeper fair to view,
And Lakshman plucked the bloom and round
Sugriva's neck a garland wound.

Graced with the flowery wreath he wore,
The Vanar chief the semblance bore
Of a dark cloud at close of day
Engarlanded with cranes at play.
In glorious light the Vanar glowed
As by his comrade's side he strode,
And still on Rama's words intent,
His steps to great Kishkindha bent.

* * * *

Canto XIII

THE RETURN TO KISHKINDHA

Thus with Sugriva, from the side
Of Rishyamuka, Rama hied,
And stood before Kishkindha's gate
Where Bali kept his regal state.
The hero in his warrior hold

* * * *

Canto XIV

THE CHALLENGE

They stood where trees of densest green
Wove round their forms a veiling screen.
O'er all the garden's pleasant shade
The eyes of King Sugriva strayed,
And, as on grass and trees he gazed,
The fires of wrath within him blazed.
Then like a mighty cloud on high,
When roars the tempest through the sky,
Girt by his friends he thundered out
His dread sky-rending battle-shout.

* * * *

Canto XV

TARA

That shout, which shook the land with fear,
In thunder smote on Bali's ear,
Where in the chamber barred and closed

The sovereign with his dame reposed.
Each amorous thought was rudely stilled,
And pride and rage his bosom filled.
His angry eyes flashed darkly red,
And all his native brightness fled,
As when, by swift eclipse assailed,
The glory of the sun has failed.
While in his fury uncontrolled
He ground his teeth, his eyeballs rolled,
He seemed a lake wherein no gem
Of blossom decks the lotus stem.
He heard, and with indignant pride
Forth from the bower the Vanar hied,
And the earth trembled at the beat
And fury of his hastening feet.
But Tara to her consort flew,
Her loving arms around him threw,
And trembling and bewildered, gave
Wise counsel that might heal and save :
O dear my lord, this rage control
That like a torrent floods thy soul,
And cast these idle thoughts away
Like faded wreaths of yesterday.
O tarry till the morning light,
Then, if thou wilt, go forth and fight.
Think not I doubt thy valour, no ;
Or deem thee weaker than thy foe,
Yet for a while would have thee stay
Nor see thee tempt the fight to-day.
Now list, my loving lord, and learn
The reason why I bid thee turn.
Thy foeman came in wrath and pride,
And thee to deadly fight defied.
Thou wentst out : he fought, and fled
Sore wounded and discomfited.
But yet, untaught by late defeat,
He comes his conquering foe to meet,
And calls thee forth with cry and shout :
Hence spring, my lord, this fear and doubt.
A heart so bold that will not yield,
But yearns to tempt the desperate field,
Such loud defiance, fiercely pressed,

On no uncertain hope can rest.
So lately by thine arm o'erthrown,
He comes not back, I wean, alone.
Some mightier comrade guards his side,
And spurs him to this burst of pride.
For nature made the Vanar wise :
On arms of might his hope relies ;
And never will Sugriva seek
A friend whose power to save is weak.
Now listen while my lips unfold
The wondrous tale my Angad told.
Our child the distant forest sought,
And, learnt from spies, the tidings brought
Two sons of Dasaratha, sprung
From old Ikshvaku, brave and young,
Renowned in arms, in war untamed—
Rama and Lakshman are they named—
Have with thy foe Sugriva made
A league of love and friendly aid.
Now Rama, famed for exploit high,
Is bound thy brother's firm ally.
Like fires of doom that ruin all
He makes each foe before him fall.
He is the suppliant's sure defence,
The tree that shelters innocence.
The poor and wretched seek his feet :
In him the noblest glories meet.
With skill and knowledge vast and deep
His sire's commands he loved to keep ;
With princely gifts and graces stored
As metals deck the mountains' Lord.
Thou canst not, O my hero, stand
Before the might of Rama's hand ;
For none may match his power, or dare
With him in deeds of war compare.
Hear, I entreat, the words I say,
Nor lightly turn my rede away.
O let fraternal discord cease,
And link you in the bonds of peace.
Let consecrating rites ordain
Sugriva partner of thy reign.
Let war and thoughts of conflict end,

And be thou his and Rama's friend.
Each soft approach of love begin,
And to thy soul thy brother win;
For whether here or there he be,
Thy brother still, dear lord, is he.
Though far and wide these eyes I strain
A friend like him I seek in vain.
Let gentle words his heart incline,
And gifts and honours make him thine,
Till, foes no more, in love allied,
You stand as brothers side by side.
Thou in high rank wast wont to hold
Sugriva, formed in massive mould;
Then come, thy brother's love regain,
For other aids are weak and vain.
If thou would please my soul, and still
Preserve me from all fear and ill,
I pray thee by thy love be wise
And do the thing which I advise.
Assuage thy brute wrath, and shun
The mightier arms of Raghu's son;
For Indra's peer in might is he,
A foe too strong, my lord, for thee.'

Canto XVI

THE FALL OF BALI

Thus Tara with the starry eyes
Her counsel gave with burning sighs,
But Bali, by her prayers unmoved,
Spurned her advice, and thus reproved:
'How may this insult, scathe, and scorn
By me, dear love, be tamely borne?
My brother, yea my foe, comes nigh
And dares me forth with shout and cry.
Learn, trembler! that the valiant, they
Who yield no step in battle fray,
Will die a thousand deaths but ne'er
An unavenged dishonour bear.
Nor, O my love, be thou dismayed
Thou Rama lend Sugriva aid;
For one so pure and duteous, one

Who loves the right, all sin will shun.
Release me from thy soft embrace,
And with thy dames thy steps retrace :
Enough already, O mine own,
Of love and sweet devotion shown.
Drive all thy fear and doubt away ;
I seek Sugriva in the fray
His boisterous rage and pride to still,
And tame the foe I would not kill.
My fury, armed with brandished trees,
Shall strike Sugriva to his knees :
Nor shall the humbled foe withstand
The blows of my avenging hand,
When, nerved by rage and pride, I beat
The traitor down beneath my feet.
Thou love, hast lent thine own sweet aid,
And all thy tender care displayed ;
Now by my life, by these who yearn
To serve thee well, I pray thee turn.
But for a while, dear dame, I go,
To come triumphant o'er the foe.'

Thus Bali spake in gentlest tone :
Soft arms about his neck were thrown ;
Then round her lord the lady went
With sad steps slow and reverent.
She stood in solemn guise to bless
With prayers for safety and success :
Then with her train her chamber sought
By grief and racking fear distraught.

With serpent's pantings fierce and fast
King Bali, from the city passed.
His glance, as each quick breath he drew,
Around to find the foe he threw,
And saw where fierce Sugriva showed
His form with golden hues that glowed,
And, as a fire resplendent, stayed
To meet his foe in arms arrayed.
When Bali, long-armed chieftain, found
Sugriva stationed on the ground,
Impelled by warlike rage he braced
His warrior garb about his waist,
And with his mighty arm raised high

Rushed at Sugriva with a cry.
But when Sugriva, fierce and bold,
Saw Bali with his chain of gold,
His arm he heaved, his hand he closed,
And face to face his foe opposed.
To him whose eyes with fury shone,
In charge impetuous rushing on,
Skilled in each warlike art and plan,
Bali with hasty words began :
'My ponderous hand, to fight addressed,
With fingers clenched and firm compressed,
Shall on thy death-doomed brow descend
And, crashing down, thy life shall end.'
He spoke ; and, wild with rage and pride,
The fierce Sugriva thus replied :
'Thus let my arm begin the strife
And from thy body crush the life.'
Then Bali, wounded and enraged,
With furious blows the battle waged.
Sugriva seemed, with blood-streams dyed,
A hill with fountains in his side.
But with his native force unspent
A Sal tree from the earth he rent,
And like the bolt of Indra smote
On Bali's head and chest and throat.
Bruised by the blows he could not shield,
Half vanquished Bali sank and reeled,
As sinks a vessel with her freight
Borne down by overwhelming weight.
Swift as Suparna's swiftest flight
In awful strength they rushed to fight :
So might the sun and moon on high
Encountering battle in the sky.
Fierce and more fierce, as fought the foes,
The furious rage of combat rose.
They warred with feet and arms and knees,
With nails and stones and boughs and trees,
And blows descending fast as rain
Dyed each dark form with crimson stain,
While like two thunder-clouds they met
With battle-cry and shout and threat.
Then Rama saw Sugriva quail,

Marked his worn strength grow weak and fail,
Saw how he turned his wistful eye
To every quarter of the sky.
His friend's defeat he could not brook,
Bent on his shaft an eager look,
Then burned to slay the conquering foe,
And laid his arrow on the bow.
As to an orb the bow he drew
Forth from the string the arrow flew
Like Fate's tremendous discus hurled
By Yama forth to end the world.
So loud the din that every bird
The bow-string's clang with terror heard,
And wildly fled the affrighted deer
As though the day of doom were near.
So deadly as the serpent's fang,
Forth from the string the arrow sprang.
Like the red lightning's flash and flame
It flew unerring to its aim,
And, hissing murder through the air,
Pierced Bali's breast, and quivered there.
Struck by the shaft that flew so well
The mighty Vanar reeled and fell,
As earthward Indra's flag they pull
When Asvini's fair moon is full.

CANTO XVII

BALI'S SPEECH

Like some proud tree before the blast
Brave Bali to the ground was cast,
Where prostrate in the dust he rolled
Clad in the sheen of glistening gold,
As when uptorn the standard lies
Of the great God who rules the skies.

* * * *

As fell the hero, crushed in fight,
There beamed afar a triple light
From limbs, from chain, from shaft that drank
His life-blood as the warrior sank.
The never-failing shaft, impelled

By the great bow which Rama held,
Brought bliss supreme, and lit the way
To Brahma's worlds which ne'er decay.
Rama and Lakshman nearer drew
The mighty fallen foe to view,

* * * *

The wounded Bali, when he saw
Rama and Lakshman nearer draw,
Keen words to Raghu's son, impressed
With justice's holy stamp addressed :
'What fame, from one thou hast not slain
In front of battle, canst thou gain,
Whose secret hand has laid me low
When madly fighting with my foe ?
From every tongue thy glory rings,
A scion of a line of kings,
True to thy vows, of noblest race,
With every gentle gift and grace :
Whose tender heart for woe can feel,
And joy in every creature's weal :
Whose breast with high ambition swells,
Knows duty's claim and ne'er rebels.
They praise thy valour, patience, ruth,
Thy firmness, self-restraint, and truth :
Thy hand prepared for sin's control,
All virtues of a princely soul.
I thought of all these gifts of thine,
And glories of an ancient line,
I set my Tara's tears at naught,
I met Sugriva and we fought.
O Rama, till this fatal morn
I held that thou wouldst surely scorn
To strike me as I fought my foe
And thought not of a stranger's blow.
But now thine evil heart is shown,
A yawning well with grass o'ergrown.
Thou wearest virtue's badge, but guile
And meanest sin thy soul defile.
I took thee not for treacherous fire,
A sinner clad in saint's attire ;
Nor deemed thou idly wouldst profess
The show and garb of righteousness.

In fenced town, in open land,
Ne'er hast thou suffered at this hand.
Nor canst of proud contempt complain :
Then wherefore is the guiltless slain ?
My harmless life in woods I lead,
On forest fruits and roots I feed.
My foeman in the field I sought,
And ne'er with thee, O Rama, fought.
Upon thy limbs, O King, I see
The raiment of a devotee ;
And how can one like thee, who springs
From a proud line of ancient kings,
Beneath fair virtue's mask, disgrace
His lineage by a deed so base ?
From Raghu is thy long descent,
For duteous deeds pre-eminent :
Why, sinner clad in saintly dress,
Roamest thou through the wilderness ?
Truth, valour, justice free from spot,
The hand that gives and grudges not,
The might that strikes the sinner down,
These bring a prince his best renown.
Here in the woods, O King, we live
On roots and fruit which branches give.
Thus nature framed our harmless race :
Thou art a man supreme in place.
Silver and gold and land provoke
The fierce attack, the robber's stroke.
Canst thou desire this wild retreat,
The berries and the fruit we eat ?
'Tis not for mighty kings to tread
The flowery path, by pleasure led.
Theirs be the arm that crushes sin,
Theirs the soft grace to woo and win :
The steadfast will that guides the state,
Wise favour to the good and great ;
And for all time are kings renowned
Who blend these arts and ne'er confound.
But thou art weak and swift to ire,
Unstable, slave of each desire.
Thou tramplest duty in the dust,
And in thy bow is all thy trust.

Thou carest naught for noble gain,
And treatest virtue with disdain,
While every sense its captive draws
To follow pleasure's changing laws.
I wronged thee not in word or deed,
But by thy deadly dart I bleed.
What wilt thou, mid the virtuous, say
To purge thy lasting stain away?
All these, O King, must sink to hell,
The regicide, the infidel,
He who in blood and slaughter joys,
A Brahman or a cow destroys,
Untimely weds in law's despite
Scorning an elder brother's right,
Who dares his Teacher's bed ascend,
The miser, spy, and treacherous friend.
These impious wretches, one and all,
Must to the hell of sinners fall.
My skin the holy may not wear,
Useless to thee my bones and hair;
Nor may my slaughtered body be
The food of devotees like thee.
These five-toed things a man may slay
And feed upon the fallen prey;
The mailed rhinoceros may die,
And, with the hare, his food supply
Iguanas he may kill and eat,
With porcupine and tortoise meat.
But all the wise account it sin
To touch my bones and hair and skin.
My flesh they may not eat; and I
A useless prey, O Rama, die.
In vain my Tara reasoned well,
On dull deaf ears her counsel fell.
I scorned her words though sooth and sweet,
And hither rushed my fate to meet.
Ah for the land thou rulest! She
Finds no protection, lord, from thee,
Neglected like some noble dame
By a vile husband dead to shame.
Mean-hearted coward, false and vile,
Whose cruel soul delights in guile,

Could Dasaratha, noblest king,
Beget so mean and base a thing?
Alas! an elephant, in form
Of Rama, in a maddening storm
Of passion casting to the ground
The girth of law that clipped him round,
Too wildly passionate to feel
The prick of duty's guiding steel,
Has charged me unawares, and dead
I fall beneath his murderous tread.
How, stained with this my base defeat,
How wilt thou dare, where good men meet,
To speak, when every tongue will blame
With keen reproach this deed of shame?
Such hero strength and valour, shown
Upon the innocent alone,
Thou hast not proved in manly strife
On him who robbed thee of thy wife.
Hadst thou but fought in open field
And met me boldly unconcealed,
This day had been thy fate to fall,
Slain by this hand, to Yama's hall.
In vain I strove, and struck by thee
Fell by a hand I could not see.
Thus bites a snake, for sins of yore,
A sleeping man who wakes no more.
Sugriva's foeman thou hast killed,
And thus his heart's desire fulfilled:
But Rama, hadst thou sought me first,
And told the hope thy soul has nursed,
That very day had I restored
The Maithil lady to her lord;
And, binding Ravan with a chain,
Had laid him at thy feet unslain.
Yea, were she sunk in deepest hell,
Or whelmed beneath the ocean's swell,
I would have followed on her track
And brought the rescued lady back,
As Hayagriva once set free
From hell the white Asvatari.
That when my spirit wings its flight
Sugriva reign, is just and right.

But most unjust, O King, that I,
Slain by thy treacherous hand, should lie.
Be still, my heart : this earthly state
Is darkly ruled by sovereign Fate.
The realm is lost and won : defy
Thy questioners with apt reply.'

Canto XVIII

RAMA'S REPLY

He ceased : and Rama's heart was stirred
At every keen reproach he heard.
There Bali lay, a dim dark sun,
His course of light and glory run :
Or like the bed of Ocean dried
Of his broad floods from side to side,
Or helpless, as the dying fire,
Hushed his last words of righteous ire.
Then Rama, with his spirit moved,
The Vanar king in turn reproved :
'Why dost thou, Bali, thus revile,
And castest not a glance the while
On claims of duty, love, and gain,
And customs o'er the world that reign ?
Why dost thou blame me, rash and blind,
Fickle as all thy Vanar kind,
Slighting each rule of ancient days
Which all the good and prudent praise ?
This land, each hill and woody chase,
Belongs to old Ikshvaku's race :
With bird and beast and man, the whole
Is ours to cherish and control.
Now Bharat, prompt at duty's call,
Wise, just, and true, is lord of all.
Each claim of law, love, gain, he knows,
And wrath and favour duly shows.
A king from truth who never bends,
And grace with vigour wisely blends ;
With valour worthy of his race,
He knows the claims of time and place.
Now we and other kings of might,
By his ensample taught aright,

The lands of every region tread
That justice may increase and spread.
While royal Bharat, wise and just,
Rules the broad earth, his glorious trust,
Who shall attempt, while he is lord,
A deed by Justice held abhorred ?
We now, as Bharat has decreed,
Let justice guide our every deed,
And toil each sinner to repress
Who scorns the way of righteousness.
Thou from that path hast turned aside,
And virtue's holy law defied,
Left the fair path which kings should tread,
And followed pleasure's voice instead.
The man who cleaves to duty's law
Regards these three with filial awe—
The sire, the elder brother, third
Him from whose lips his lore he heard.
Thus too, for duty's sake, the wise
Regard with fond paternal eyes
The well-loved younger brother, one
Their lore has ripened, and a son.
Fine are the laws which guide the good
Abstruse, and hardly understood ;
Only the soul, enthroned within
The breast of each, knows right from sin.
But thou art wild and weak of soul,
And spurnest, like thy race, control ;
The true and right thou canst not find,
The blind consulting with the blind.
Incline thine ear and I will teach
The cause that prompts my present speech.
This tempest of thy soul assuage,
Nor blame me in thine idle rage.
On this great sin thy thoughts bestow,
The sin for which I lay thee low.
Thou, Bali, in thy brother's life
Hast robbed him of his wedded wife,
And keepest, scorning ancient right,
His Ruma for thine own delight.
Thy son's own wife should scarcely be
More sacred in thine eyes than she.

All duty thou hast scorned, and hence
Comes punishment for dire offence.
For those who blindly do amiss
There is, I ween, no way but this:
To check the rash who dare to stray
From customs which the good obey.
I may not, sprung of Kshatriya line,
Forgive this heinous sin of thine:
The laws for those who sin like thee
The penalty of death decree.
Now Bharat rules with sovereign sway,
And we his royal word obey.
There was no hope of pardon, none,
For the vile deed that thou hast done.
That wisest monarch dooms to die
The wretch whose crimes the law defy;
And we, chastising those who err,
His righteous doom administer.
My soul accounts Sugriva dear
E'en as my brother Lakshman here.
He brings me blessing, and I swore
His wife and kingdom to restore:
A bond in solemn honour bound
When Vanar chieftains stood around.
And can a king like me forsake
His friend, and plighted promise break?
Reflect, O Vanar, on the cause,
The sanction of eternal laws,
And, justly smitten down, confess
Thou diest for thy wickedness.
By honour was I bound to lend
Assistance to a faithful friend;
And thou hast met a righteous fate
Thy former sins to expiate.
And thus wilt thou some merit win
And make atonement for thy sin.
For hear me, Vanar King, rehearse
What Manu spake in ancient verse—
This holy law, which all accept
Who honour duty, have I kept:
'Pure grow the sinners kings chastise,
And like the virtuous, gain the skies;

By pain or full atonement freed,
They reap the fruit of righteous deed,
While kings who punish not incur
The penalties of those who err.'
Mandhata, once a noble king,
Light of the line from which I spring,
Punished with death a devotee
When he had stooped to sin like thee;
And many a king in ancient time
Has punished frantic sinners' crime,
And, when their impious blood was spilt,
Has washed away the stain of guilt.
Cease, Bali, cease: no more complain:
Reproaches and laments are vain,
For thou art justly punished: we
Obey our king and are not free.
Once more, O Bali, lend thine ear.
Another weightiest plea to hear,
For this, when heard and pondered well,
Will all complaint and rage dispel.
My soul will ne'er this deed repent,
Nor was my shaft in anger sent.
We taken the silvan tribes beset
With snare and trap and gin and net,
And many a heedless deer we smite
From thickest shade, concealed from sight.
Wild for the slaughter of the game,
At stately stags our shafts we aim.
We strike them bounding scared away,
We strike them as they stand at bay,
When careless in the shade they lie,
Or scan the plain with watchful eye.
They turn away their heads: we aim,
And none the eager hunter blame.
Each royal saint, well trained in law
Of duty loves his bow to draw
And strike the quarry, e'en as thou
Hast fallen by mine arrow now,
Fighting with him or unaware—
A Vanar thou—I little care.
But, yet, O best of Vanars, know
That kings who rule the earth bestow

Fruit of pure life and virtuous deed,
And lofty duty's hard-won meed.
Harm not thy lord the king : abstain
From act and word that cause him pain.
For kings are children of the skies
Who walk this earth in men's disguise.
But thou, in duty's claims untaught,
Thy breast with blinding passion fraught,
Assailest me who still have clung
To duty, with thy bitter tongue.'
He ceased : and Bali sore distressed
The sovereign claims of law confessed,
And freed, o'erwhelmed with woe and shame,
The lord of Raghu's race from blame.
Then, reverent palm to palm applied,
To Rama thus the Vanar cried :
'True, best of men, is every word
That from thy lips these ears have heard.
It ill beseems a wretch like me
To bandy empty words with thee.
Forgive the angry taunts that broke
From my wild bosom as I spoke,
And lay not to my charge, O King,
My mad reproaches' idle sting.
Thou, in the truth by trial trained,
Best knowledge of the right hast gained ;
And layest, just and pure within,
The meetest penalty on sin,
Through every bond of law I burst,
The boldest sinner and the worst.
O let thy right-instructing speech
Console my heart and wisely teach.'
Like some sad elephant who stands
Fast sinking in the treacherous sands,
Thus Bali raised despairing eyes ;
Then spake again with sobs and sighs :
'Not for myself, O king, I grieve,
For Tara or the friends I leave,
As for sweet Angad, my dear son,
My noble, only little one.
For, nursed in luxury and bliss
His father he will mourn and miss,

And like a stream whose fount is dry
Will waste away and sink and die,—
My own dear child, my only boy,
His mother Tara's hope and joy.
Spare him, O son of Raghu, spare
The child entrusted to thy care.
My Angad and Sugriva treat
E'en as thy heart considers meet,
For thou, O chief of men, art strong
To guard the right and punish wrong.
O, if thou wilt thine ear incline
To hear these dying words of mine,
He and Sugriva will to thee
As Bharat and as Lakshman be.
Let not my Tara left forlorn,
Weep for Sugriva's wrathful scorn ;
Nor let him, for her lord's offence,
Condemn her faithful innocence.
And well and wisely may he reign
If thy dear grace his power sustain :
If, following thee his friend and guide,
He turn not from thy hest aside :
Thus may he reign with glory, nay
Thus to the skies will win his way.
Though stayed by Tara's fond recall,
By thy dear hand I longed to fall.
Against my brother rushed and fought,
And gained the death I long have sought.'

Canto XIX

TARA'S GRIEF

But Tara in the Vanar's hall
Heard tidings of her husband's fall ;
Heard that a shaft from Rama's bow
Had laid the royal Bali low.
Her darling Angad by her side,
Distracted from her home she hied.

* * * *

She hastened forth, her bosom rent
With anguish, weeping as she went,
And striking, mastered by her woes,

Her head and breast with frantic blows.
She hurried to the field and found
Her husband prostrate on the ground,
Who quelled the hostile Vanar's might,
Whose back was never turned in flight :
Whose arm a massy rock could throw
As Indra hurls his bolts below :
Fierce as the rushing tempest, loud
As thunder from a labouring cloud :
Whene'er he roared his voice of fear
Struck terror on the boldest ear :
Now slain, as, hungry for the prey,
A tiger might a lion slay :
Or when, his serpent foe to seek,
Suparna with his furious beak
Tears up a sacred hillock, long
The reverence of a village throng,
Its altar with their offerings spread,
And the gay flag that waved o'erhead.
She looked and saw the victor stand
Resting upon his bow his hand ;
And fierce Sugriva she descried,
And Lakshman by his brother's side.
She passed them by, nor stayed to view,
Swift to her husband's side she flew ;
Then as she looked, her strength gave way,
And in the dust she fell and lay.
Then, as if startled ere the close
Of slumber, from the earth she rose.
Upon her dying husband, round
Whose soul the coils of Death were wound,
Her eyes in agony she bent
And called him with a shrill lament.
Sugriva, when he heard her cries,
And saw the queen with weeping eyes,
And youthful Angad standing there,
His load of grief could hardly bear.

Canto XX

TARA'S LAMENT

Again she bent her to the ground,
Her arms about her husband wound,

Sobbed on his breast, and sick and faint
With anguish poured her wild complaint :

* * * *

Again the hapless Tara wept
As to her husband's side she crept,
And wild with sorrow and dismay
Sat on the ground where Bali lay.

CANTO XXII

BALI DEAD

There breathing still with slow faint sighs
Lay Bali on the ground : his eyes,
Damp with the tears of death, he raised,
On conquering Sugriva gazed,
And then in clearest speech expressed
The tender feelings of his breast :
'Not to my charge, Sugriva, lay
Thine injuries avenged to-day ;
But rather blame resistless Fate
That urged me on infuriate.
Fate ne'er agreed our lives to bless
With simultaneous happiness :
To dwell like brothers side by side
In tender love was still denied.
The Vanars' realm is thine to-day :
Begin, O King, thy rightful sway ;
For I must go at Yama's call
To sojourn in his gloomy hall ;
Must part and leave this very hour
My life, my realm, my kingly power,
And go instead of these to gain
Bright glory free from spot and stain.
Now at thy hands one boon I seek
With the last words my lips shall speak,
And, though it be no easy thing,
Perform the task I give thee, King.
This son of mine, no foolish boy,
Worthy of bliss and nursed in joy,—
See, prostrate on the ground he lies,
The hot tears welling from his eyes—
The child I love so well, more sweet

Than life itself, for woe unmeet,—
To him be kindly favour shown :
O guard and keep him as thine own.
Retain him ever by thy side,
His father, helper, friend, and guide.
From fear and woe his young life save,
And give him all his father gave.
Then Tara's son in time shall be
Brave, resolute and famed like thee,
And march before thee to the fight
Where stricken fiends shall own his might.
While yet a tender stripling, fame
Shall bruit abroad his warrior name,
And brightly shall his glory shine
For exploits worthy of his line.
Child of Sushen, my Tara well
Obscurest lore can read and tell ;
And, trained in wondrous art, divines
Each mystery of boding signs.
Her solemn warning ne'er despise,
Do boldly what her lips advise ;
For things to come her eye can see,
And with her words events agree.
And for the son of Raghu's sake
The toil and danger undertake :
For breach of faith were grievous wrong,
Nor wouldst thou be unpunished long.
Now, brother, take this chain of gold,
Gift of celestial hands of old,
Or when I die its charm will flee,
And all its might be lost with me.'

The loving speech Sugriva heard,
And all his heart with woe was stirred.
Remorse and gentle pity stole
Each thought of triumph from his soul :
Thus fades the light when Rahu mars
The glory of the Lord of Stars.
All angry thoughts were stayed and stilled,
And kindly love his bosom filled.
His brother's word the chief obeyed
And took the chain as Bali prayed.
On little Angad standing nigh

The dying hero fixed his eye,
And, ready from this world to part,
Spoke the fond utterance of his heart :

'Let time and place thy thoughts employ :
In woe be strong, be meek in joy.
Accept both pain and pleasure, still
Obedient to Sugriva's will.
Thou hast, my darling, from the first
With tender care been softly nursed ;
But harder days, if thou wouldst win
Sugriva's love, must now begin.
To those who hate him ne'er incline,
Nor count his foe a friend of thine.
In all thy thoughts his welfare seek,
Obedient, lowly, faithful, meek.
Let no rash suit his bosom pain,
Nor yet from due requests abstain.
Each is a grievous fault, between
The two is found the happy mean.'
Then Bali ceased : his eyeballs rolled
In stress of anguish uncontrolled.
His massive teeth were bared to view,
And from the frame the spirit flew.

INDEX

An Index is furnished below of those stanzas in the KAMBA RAMAYANAM *translated by Aiyar, in order of Kandam and Padalam according to the annotated edition of Sri V. M. Gopalakrishnamachariar, which it is hoped may be found useful. A similar index for the chapter on Sita follows. The reference given here is to the page on which the first stanza in the set begins. The foot-note reference might be found in many cases on a subsequent page.*

—PUBLISHERS.

Padalam	*Stanza*	*Page*
I பால காண்டம்		
ix அகலிகை		
	82	62
x மிதிலைக் காட்சி		
	1	6
xi குலமுறை கிளத்து		
	26-28	62
xii கார்முக		
	33	55
xxii பரசுராம		
	38	64
II அயோத்தியா காண்டம்		
i மந்திர		
	40[1]	51
	72[1]	48
ii மந்தரை சூழ்ச்சி		
	45, 47	280
	48-52	281
	54-62	282
	64-67	283
	69-76	285
	77, 78	35
	83, 84	286
iii கைகேயி சூழ்வினை		
	26-29, 32, 33	287
	33, 34, 44	288
	103-106	289
	107, 108, 110	9
iv நகர் நீங்கு		
	116	71
	117, 121, 122, 125	72
	126	73
	134	48
	137, 139, 140	73
	149, 157, 159	74
	224, 226-228	11
v தைல மாட்டு		
	73-76	51
viii சித்திரகூட		
	52	49
ix பள்ளியடை		
	7	289
	55, 56	290
	58, 60-62	291
	70, 71	292
	72	69, 292
	73, 74, 76-79, 81, 82, 90, 93	293
	96, 98-103, 105-7, 113, 115, 117	294
	118, 120	295
	132, 136, 138	296
x ஆறுசெல்		
	12-20	296
xi குக		
	14-17, 19, 22	297
	27	298
	29, 30, 33	299
	35, 36, 40	300
	42, 43, 65, 68, 69, 70	301
xii திருவடி சூட்டு		
	30, 34, 36, 38-40, 42, 43	76
	44, 45	52
	51, 53, 96	302
	97, 98, 101-103	303
	114-117	304
	129, 131, 132	305

[1] இவை முறையே 38, 70 என்று தவறாக நூலில் காட்டப்பட்டுள்ளன.

Padalam *Stanza* *Page*

III ஆரணிய காண்டம்

iii அகத்திய
17, 19, 21 .. 66

v சூர்பணகை
31, 32, 34-37, 45-56 .. 58
70 .. 60

vii மாரீசன் வதை
24-29, 36, 45, 46, 49-51 .. 233
58, 60, 61 .. 234
67, 68-71, 73, 77 .. 235
79-81 .. 236
82-87 .. 239
149 .. 240
199 .. 249
232-234 .. 77
237, 238 .. 60

viii சடாயு வுயிர் நீத்த
20-22, 26-34 .. 243
35-40 .. 244
49-55 .. 245
62 .. 256
64 .. 249
158 .. 61
201, 203-206 .. 63

ix அயோமுகி
63, 67, 68, 71 54

IV கிட்கிந்தா காண்டம்

ii மராமர
12-15, 20, 36, 37, 40 .. 196
49 .. 197
112 .. 170

v வாலி வதை
14-20 .. 171
21-27 .. 172
31-33 .. 173
34, 35 .. 174
36-38, 40-43, 45-48 .. 175
57 .. 176
64, 65 .. 177
67-69, 71, 72 .. 178
74, 76-84, 86-90 .. 179
92-102 .. 181
104, 105, 107-115 .. 182
116 .. 183
117, 119-130 .. 184
132-134, 136, 137, 146-149 186
151 .. 187

viii கிட்கிந்தை
4 .. 63

x நாடவிட்ட
60, 62, 63, 67-72 .. 78

xiii சம்பாதி
13-15 .. 198

xiv மகேந்திர
9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 19 .. 200
21-25 .. 201

V சுந்தரகாண்டம்

ii ஊர் தேடு
41, 72, 73 .. 204
83-86 .. 205
95 .. 206
141 .. 83, 207
142 .. 207
199, 200 .. 203
201, 202, 205 209
219, 220 .. 210
221-223 .. 211
225-227, 229-233 .. 212

iii காட்சி
17 .. 70
20 .. 48
25 .. 49
23 .. 51
33, 65, 67-73 .. 213
75, 76 .. 214

iv நிந்தனை
24, 26-29, 31-37 .. 247
40, 41, 50, 51, 58 .. 15
65, 66, 68, 69, 71-73 .. 16

v உருக்காட்டு
11-13, 15, 17, 19, 20 .. 215
21-25 .. 216
27, 28, 32, 34 217
35, 37 .. 218
59-63 .. 219
71, 72 .. 19
77, .. 61
97 .. 219
99-104, 109, 110, 112 .. 220
113-117 .. 221

vi சூளாமணி
83 .. 49

xii பாச
4 .. 103
5 .. 102
9-11 .. 101
15 .. 103
18 .. 102
25-27 .. 222

Padalam	Stanza	Page
xiii பிணி வீட்டு		
	56, 57, 59	223
	61, 62, 64, 65	224
	70, 74, 75, 79, 80	199
	113, 116	125
xv திருவடி தொழுத		
	8, 9	225
	10	226
	82, 83	61
VI யுத்த காண்டம்		
ii இராவணன் மந்திர		
	12-14	249
	53	137
	58, 59	102
	60, 61	103
	66, 67, 70, 72-75	126
	90, 91, 95, 96, 99, 101, 102, 106, 108, 109	127
	113, 116, 117	123
iii இரணியன் வதை		
	24-33	155
	35, 37	156
	40, 42, 44-46	157
	47-56	158
	59, 62, 64, 69, 70, 72, 74-78	159
	80, 86, 93	161
	118-130	162
	132, 133, 136, 139, 142, 143	164
	144, 145, 146	165
iv விபீடணன் அடைக்கல		
	3, 4, 6-9	129
	20	130
	108, 109	67
	125-127, 129	130
	146	52

Padalam	Stanza	Page
v இலங்கை கேள்வி		
	12	133
xiii அங்கதன் தூது		
	9, 13	257
	16-18, 43	259
xiv முதற் போர்		
	91, 92, 95, 96, 101	259
	133, 139	261
	155, 161, 163-166	262
	167, 169	263
	174, 175, 181-183, 185	264
	203, 204	265
	221, 232	266
	249	267
xv கும்பகருணன் வதை		
	17, 23, 25, 27, 29, 30	20
	79, 83-89	138
	90-94	139
	96-98	140
	130-135, 137-142, 144-150, 152, 153	141
	155-160, 164-166	143
	167	144
	191, 192	145
	193, 194, 200	146
	201	147
	203	78
	228, 234-236	79
	262, 263	227
	281-285	147
	286, 328-331	148
	341, 342	149
	354, 360	151

Padalam	Stanza	Page
xvi மாயா சனக		
	77-83, 86	251
xvii அதிகாயன் வதை		
	78, 79	80
	180, 188-191	81
	197-199	82
	269-272	83
xviii நாக பாச		
	7, 8	101
	21, 28	84
	73-75	86
	76, 77, 79	87
	95, 105, 106	88
	120, 167	89
	180, 188-190	90
	201	91
	209-212	133
	222-225	49
	233, 237-241	92
	243-249	*See* Appendix I
xix படைத் தலைவர் வதை		
	13	94
xxi பிரமாத்திர		
	39-43	94
	61, 62	95
	63, 66, 67	96
	206-210, 212, 214, 217, 218	98
xxiii மருந்து மலை		
	3-5	227
	20	228
	111-114	229
xxv மாயா சீதை		
	13, 14, 16-18	104
	31, 34, 35, 38-41	105
	45-50, 51-53	106
	58, 60	107
	60, 65-71	108
	78-79	50

Padalam	Stanza	Page
xxvi நிகும்பலையாக		
	70-78	.. 110
	80-85	.. 111
	91	.. 112
	98, 99	.. 113
	146	.. 114
	155-160	.. 115
	164-170	.. 116
	177, 178	.. 117
xxvii இந்திரசித்து வதை		
	2-6	.. 118
	7-12	.. 119
	13, 15	.. 120
	16	.. 121
	30, 31, 33	.. 122
	46, 51	.. 123
	56	.. 124
	64	.. 54
	65	.. 55
	71	.. 134
xxviii இராவணன் சோக		
	7, 10, 11	.. 253
	16, 17, 19, 22, 26-32	.. 254
	35-39	.. 255
	47	.. 23
	49, 53	.. 24
xxxi வேலேற்ற		
	28-32	.. 135
	46	.. 229
	48, 49	.. 136
xxxiv இராவணன் தேரேறு		
	20, 23	.. 268
	26	.. 269
xxxv இராமன் தேரேறு		
	2	.. 269
	17	.. 270
xxxvi இராவணன் வதை		
	35, 50	.. 271
	80, 90, 92, 97	273
	105, 106, 115	.. 274
	135, 136, 152	275
	175, 178	.. 276
	182	.. 173
	198, 199	.. 277
	201	.. 278
	216	.. 65
	239	.. 243
xxxvii மீட்சி		
	129-131	.. 65
	214, 215	.. 306
	216, 229-234	.. 307
	236-238, 240	.. 308
	247, 251	.. 309
xxxix விடைகொடுத்த		
	20	.. 230

INDEX TO SITA

Padalam	Stanza	Page
I பால காண்டம்		
x மிதிலைக் காட்சி		
	23	311
	26, 32	314
	35, 36	311
	37	314
	38	317
xx கோலங்காண்		
	36	313
xxi கடிமண		
	97	315
II அயோத்தியா காண்டம்		
v தைலமாட்டு		
	40	317
xii திருவடி சூட்டு		
	128	319
III ஆரணிய காண்டம்		
viii சடாயுவுயிர் நீத்த		
	4, 13	318
	56, 57	320
	58, 59, 63, 67	321
	68-70, 72	322
V சுந்தர காண்டம்		
iii காட்சி		
	3-5, 7, 9, 11	327
	12-14	329
	15	329, 337
	16, 17, 19, 20	329
	23, 24, 26, 28	330
iv நிந்தனை		
	23	323
	25, 38-42, 45, 46, 49-51, 57-59	324
v உருக்காட்டு		
	64-67	331
vi சூளாமணி		
	12-16	332
	17-19, 26, 27, 29, 30, 32	333
	34-37	334
	74, 76-79, 81, 82	335
xv திருவடி தொழுத		
	55, 58-60, 62-64	342
VI யுத்த காண்டம்		
xxxvi இராவணன் வதை		
	220, 225	319
xxxvii மீட்சி		
	34, 36, 59	338
	62-67	339
	70, 71, 73-77	340
	84	341
	176	337

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ERRATA

(*Lines are counted excluding the heading on each page.*)

Page	Line	For	Read
4	25	Rachine	Racine
22	1	lost	lose
34	31	said to the	said to be the
77	25	*delete the words* "struck down by Rama's dart"	
	27		*Add* "struck down by Rama's dart" *after* deer
85	28	Rakshasa's	Rakshasa
	42	Seeking	Seeing
91	Foot-note 2	see page 111	see page 80
92	30	his	this
116	18	bear	bare
152	Foot-note 1, line 5	ambassador's	ambassadors
212	Foot-note 2	36 miles 3 furlongs	one yojana= 36 miles 3 furlongs
216	22	now	not
343	20	Or	On